



An Internet Young People Can Trust

How young people are
managing reliability
and misleading
content online

Young people:

GENDER		
Male	Female	Prefer not to say
1002	1018	1

AGE										
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
181	202	238	202	223	202	214	238	175	156	

Parents and carers of children aged 8-17 years old:

GENDER		
Male	Female	Prefer not to say
960	1055	6



About

This report has been published by the UK Safer Internet Centre and launched for Safer Internet Day 2021.

The UK Safer Internet Centre is a partnership of three leading online safety organisations: Childnet International, Internet Watch Foundation and South West Grid for Learning UK, with a shared mission to make the UK the safest place in the world to go online. The UK Safer Internet Centre coordinates Safer Internet Day each year, reaching millions of young people, parents and carers, and educators across the UK, giving them the vital information and support they need to keep young people safe online.

Methodology

The quantitative survey was conducted online by Censuswide in December 2020, with a representative sample of 2,021 parents of children aged 8-17 years old and their children aged 8-17 years old (4,042 in total). Censuswide is a full-service research consultancy specialising in consumer and B2B research. This research was conducted on Censuswide's education network and participants under the age of 16 were contacted via their parents or guardians.

Qualitative research was also conducted with young people by Childnet with 13 children aged 9-14 years in focus groups as well as an online survey with 41 Childnet Digital Leaders aged 8-18.

Foreword

Young people want an internet they can trust

How are young people managing reliability and misleading content online? This research shines a light on how dealing with misleading content and contact has become a daily part of the online experience for many young people. It shows us how young people are thinking critically about what they see and taking responsibility for their actions online, but also facing emotional challenges and asking us to do more to build an internet they can trust.

What is misleading content?

In this research, misleading content was defined as content that is: 'inaccurate, unreliable or not true, which can cause confusion or manipulate and influence people. This can include things like sneaky or hidden sponsored ads on social media, clickbait and fake news, online gaming scams, altered and filtered images, chain messages, false profiles, things that people might say or ask for, misinformation, and more'.



The internet continues to be a space of growth, education and communication for young people. As lockdowns continue to disrupt education and everyday life, it is vitally important that young people are at the forefront of safe, responsible and engaged internet use. Being online has been a lifeline for most young people during the pandemic, in terms of their education and social lives, and also as a form of emotional support. 77% of young people say that being online was a more important part of their life in 2020 than before and 73% say that being online has helped them through the pandemic and lockdowns, supporting them emotionally.

While enormously important and useful for young people, the internet also presents challenges around trust and reliability. This research shines a light on young people's experience of unreliable content, highlighting how they are making decisions all the time about the trustworthiness of what they see or receive online. 51% of young people say that they see more misleading information online than they did before 2020 with 48% of them seeing such content at least once a day. Content such as clickbait, online gaming scams or altered images are now, for many young people, a daily part of their online experience. Given this, it is vital that we understand how they are separating unreliable content from that which they feel they can trust and identify what support they need to do this better.

Young people show a critical approach to what they encounter online and a level of confidence in their ability to spot misleading content. Only 25% of young people trust the information they see online more than they trust what they see offline. They are especially sceptical of images; 53% say that they assume images online, for example on social media, have been filtered or edited. While many young people feel able to spot certain

types of misleading content, 61% still want to learn more about how to do so.

Misleading content can present challenges for young people's emotional well-being. 91% say that being tricked and receiving misleading content makes or would make them feel annoyed, upset, sad, angry, attacked or scared.¹ As well as presenting emotional challenges, certain types of misleading content require young people to make decisions that may impact their safety; for example 62% of 8 to 17s have received friend requests from people they don't know, highlighting further still how we must do all we can to empower young people to navigate online interactions safely and reliably.

Young people are taking responsibility. 69% of young people say they have never shared misleading content and 53% feel they have a responsibility to educate their friends and family about it. Young people also want to see change. 78% think that social media and other online platforms should do more to tackle misleading content online and 72% think the government needs to get more involved in promoting safer internet use and tackling misleading content online.

Now, more than ever we need to listen to young people and pay attention to what they are telling us needs to happen to build an internet they can trust. Safer Internet Day provides an ideal opportunity to start having those conversations to support young people to get the most out of their time online. We hope that this research and the conversations generated by Safer Internet Day will catalyse action and help our young people develop the skills, knowledge and competencies they need to navigate their online world.



Will Gardner OBE
Director of the UK Safer Internet Centre

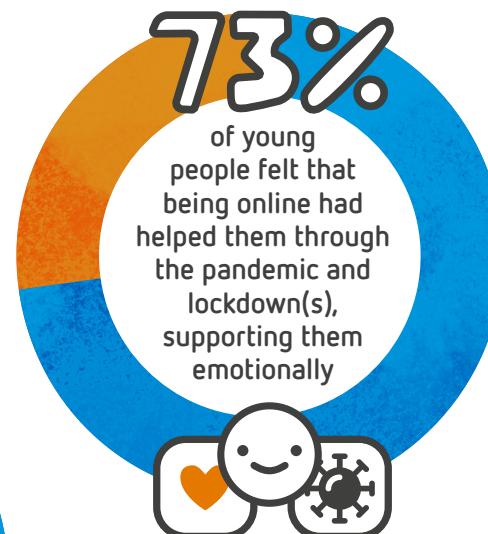
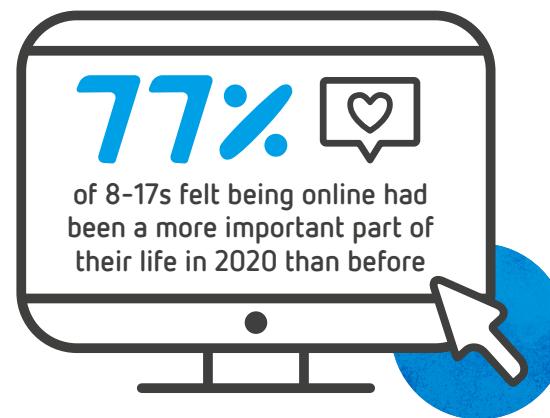
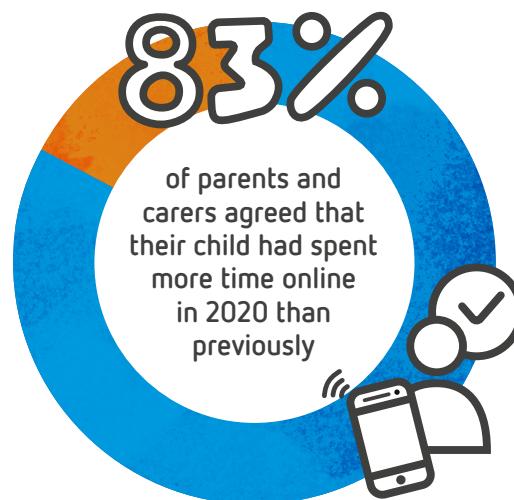
Contents



A life online more than ever before	5
Increased time online for young people in 2020 and beyond	5
Trust and reliability online	6
How often are young people seeing misleading content online?	6
How much do young people trust what they see online and offline?	7
How are young people navigating misleading content online?	9
How are young people dealing with approaches from people they don't know?	10
Young people and emotional well-being online	12
A place for emotional support	13
How does misleading content make young people feel?	14
What do young people understand about the impact of misleading content on other people?	15
Everyone's responsibility to build an internet young people can trust	16
What are young people doing about misleading content?	16
What changes do young people want to see?	17
Young People's Charter	18
Conclusion & Recommendations	19

A life online more than ever before

Increased time online for young people in 2020 and beyond



Through much of 2020, against a backdrop of repeated national and local UK lockdowns due to the pandemic, families worked, lived and learned online to an unprecedented degree. 83% of parents and carers told us that their child had spent more time online in 2020 than previously and young people agreed, with 77% saying that being online had been a more important part of their life in 2020 than before. Young people feel positive about this increased time spent online, with 65% saying they found online lessons a good way of learning and 73% saying that being online had helped them through the pandemic and lockdowns, supporting them emotionally.

While the internet continues to be an incredibly useful tool and important social space for young people, it can bring challenges. Young people must regularly use critical thinking skills and judgement to decide whether or not to treat content and contact as reliable and trustworthy. Increased time online during 2020 highlighted this for many families; with 55% of parents and carers agreeing that, during the lockdowns in 2020, they gained a better understanding of both the benefits and risks of their child being online.

65% of 8-17s found online lessons a good way of learning when schools were closed to most young people

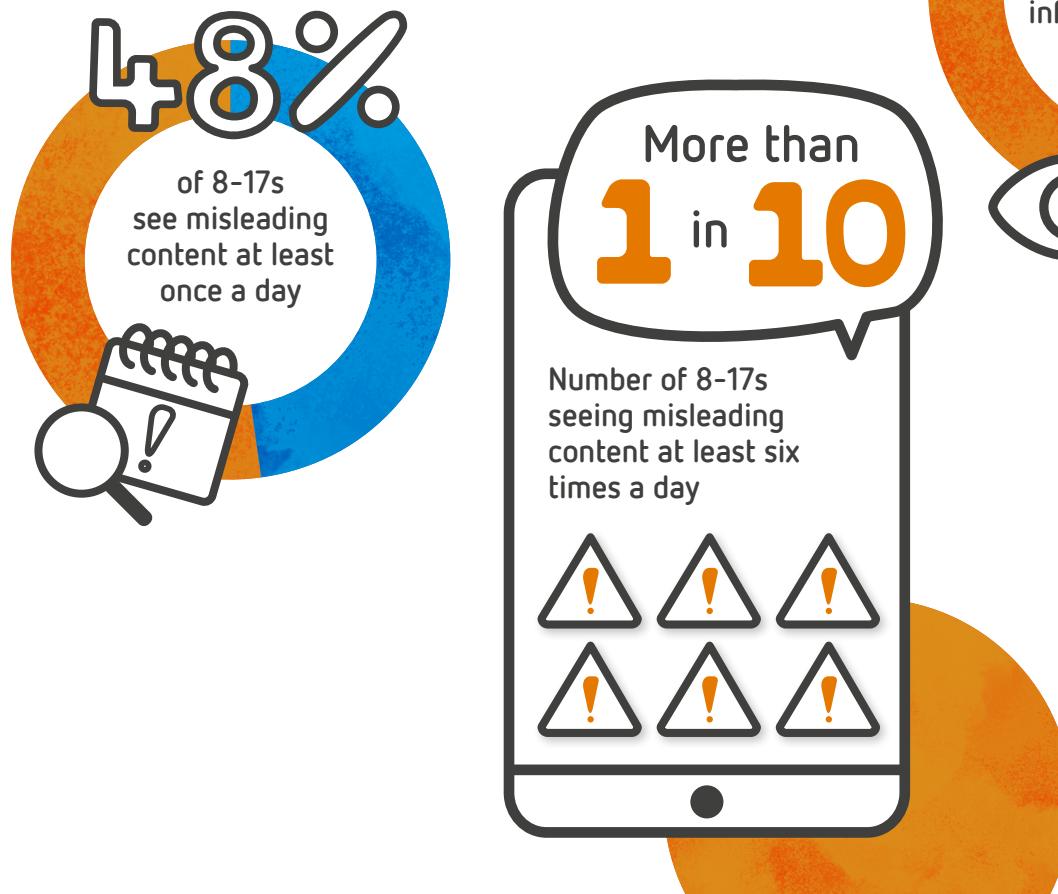
"I use the internet for everything from gaming to school research and work. Especially in recent times, as many things have become digital, I tend to use the internet more and more. It is extremely valuable to me as it has helped me with my schoolwork many times but it's also allowed me to keep in contact with a lot of my family and friends as I can't go and see them in person." **Digital Champion**

"We use the internet in lots of different ways to adults - we use it for much more than just homework!" **Primary school pupil**

"Young people are finding out that not all online information is reliable. If they keep finding that they might give up using the internet forever." **Primary school pupil**

Trust and reliability online

How often are young people seeing misleading content online?

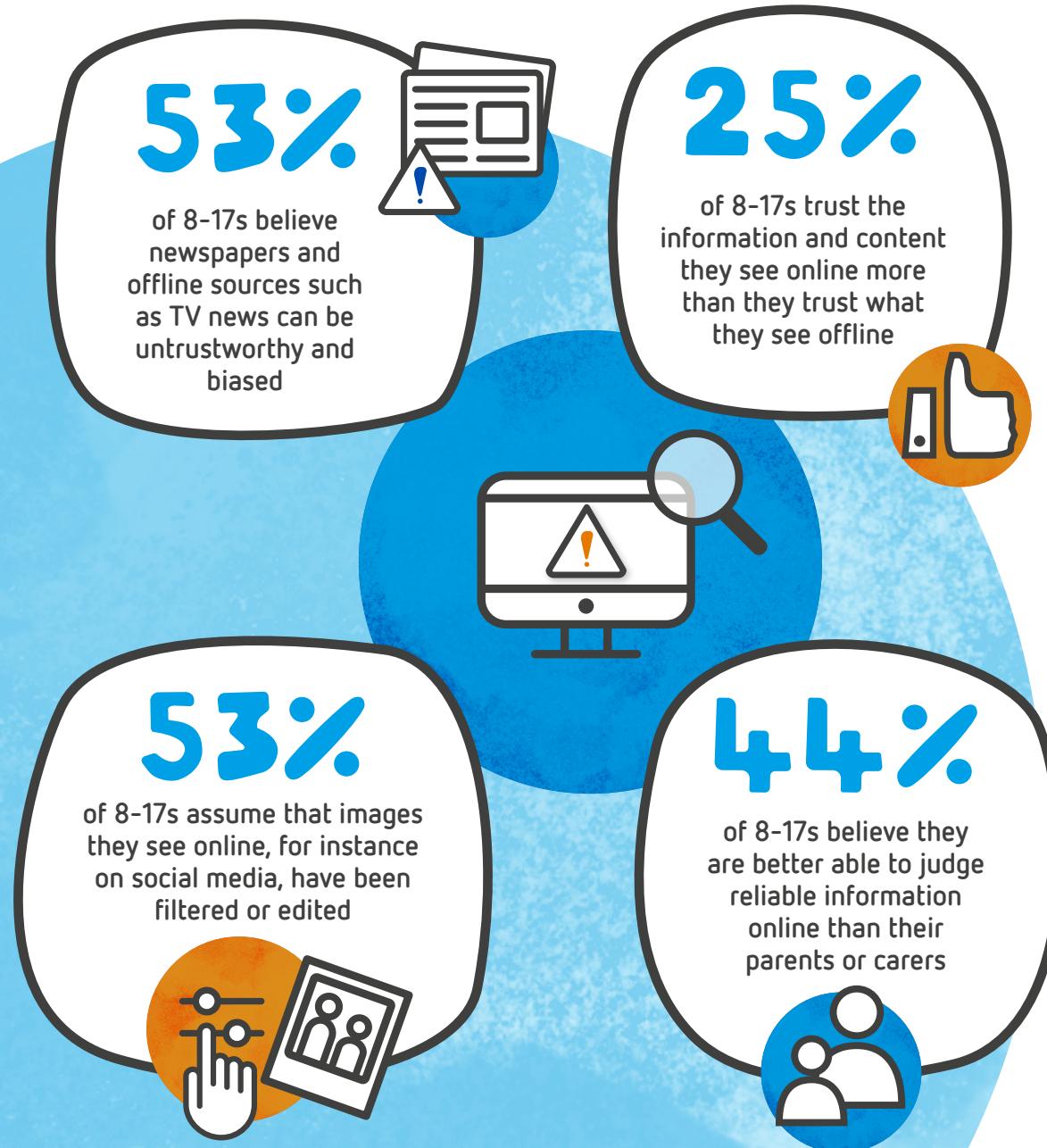


Misleading content is an increasingly significant feature of young people's online experience, with 51% agreeing that they see more misleading information online than they did before 2020. 48% of young people are seeing misleading content at least once a day and more than 1 in 10 are seeing it at least six times a day. Among 8-17 year olds, 13 years olds are slightly more likely than any other age group to say they see misleading content frequently, with 59% saying they see it every day and almost 2 in 10 saying they see it more than 6 times a day.

Young people are paying attention to who is sharing this misleading content online. 43% have noticed either their friends and peers or people their age sharing such content. Specifically, the number of young people who say they have noticed people their age sharing misleading content online rises steadily with age, from 11% at age 8 to 41% by age 16. Young people are making decisions about the trustworthiness of what people in the public sphere are sharing, with 35% of young people saying they have noticed influencers, bloggers, celebrities or people in the public eye sharing misleading content. Younger children, age 8 to 11, were more likely than those age 12 to 17 to say they had not seen anyone share misleading content online.

"Being a heavily digitalised generation, misleading information is something many of my peers and I are used to, due to its high commonality. However, being able to separate fact from lies is extremely difficult when the fake news is believable."

Youth Advisory Board member



How much do young people trust what they see online and offline?

Young people tap into a variety of online and offline sources for information. When asked what sources they are most likely to use to check the news and find the latest headlines, television news is the most popular choice, with 51% saying they are most likely to use this.

In terms of online sources of news, social media and news outlets' websites are almost equally popular choices, with 33% of young people saying they would be most likely go to social media to get news and headlines and 36% saying they would be most likely to go to a news outlet's website such as BBC News. The use of social media in particular as a source of news increases steadily with age; while 20% of 8 year olds say they would go to social media for news, this rises to 45% by age 17. News outlets' websites remain important, with 43% of 16 and 17 years olds saying they go to them for news and headlines, but it is interesting that social media is given roughly equal priority.

"I don't know if this comes from a place of paranoia or my need to be a detective, but I don't really trust any news outlet 100% because a lot of news outlets are very biased and sometimes throw in false information."

Youth Advisory Board member



"I prefer it when a video is full and not heavily edited because I feel like a lot of sites will cut and paste certain elements of a video to make it seem one way when in fact it was completely another."

Digital Champion

Young people show a critical approach to the content they see both online and offline; our research showed that they have low levels of trust in the information they see in general. Over half (53%), believe newspapers and offline sources such as TV news can be untrustworthy and biased. Only 25% of young people say they trust the information and content they see online more than they trust what they see offline. Many assume that online images have been manipulated somehow, with 53% saying that when they look at images online, for instance on social media, they assume they have been filtered or edited. Younger children were least likely to make this assumption, with 40% of 8 and 9 year olds saying they would. However, older teenagers were most likely to make this assumption about images, with 63% saying they would.

It is interesting that, while young people show relatively low levels of trust in the information and images they see online, they increasingly seek news and news headlines from social media as they get older. It would be helpful to understand this better. How are they making judgements about what news and information they deem

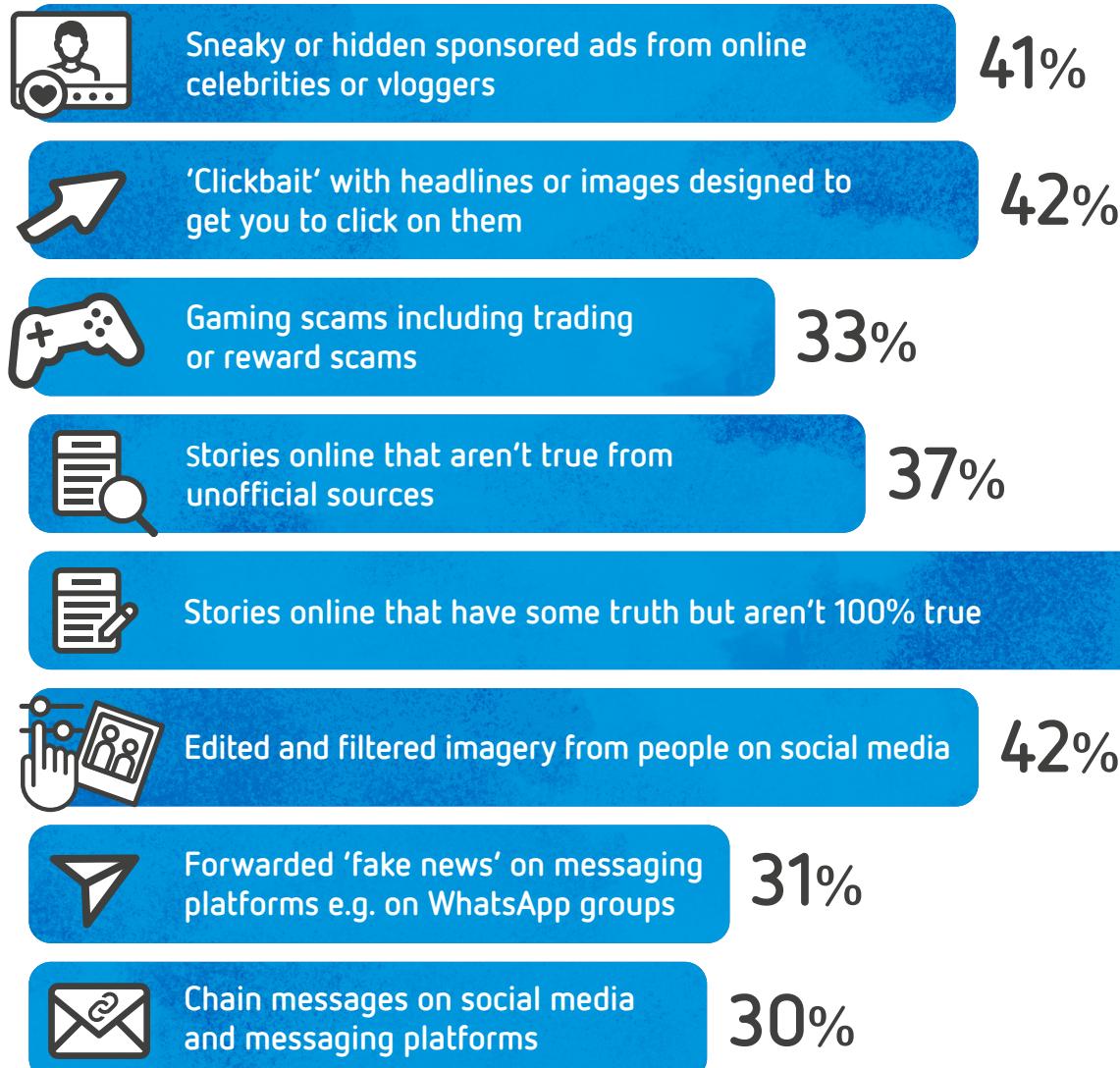
trustworthy? What do they feel they need to be able to do this with more confidence?

It is important to recognise that young people may not feel parents and carers can provide them with support to identify misleading content. Many young people actually feel that they are more confident than the adults around them when it comes to spotting misleading content online, with 44% believing they are better able to judge reliable information online than their parents or carers. This confidence increases with age; while only 32% of 8 year olds feel better able to judge reliable information online than their parents or carers, this increases to 60% by age 17.

"This situation is like climate change. If it's not handled correctly now, when it's handed over to us we will have more burdens to carry and to fix."

Secondary school pupil

Percentage of 8-17s who felt they were likely to be tricked by various types of misleading online content:



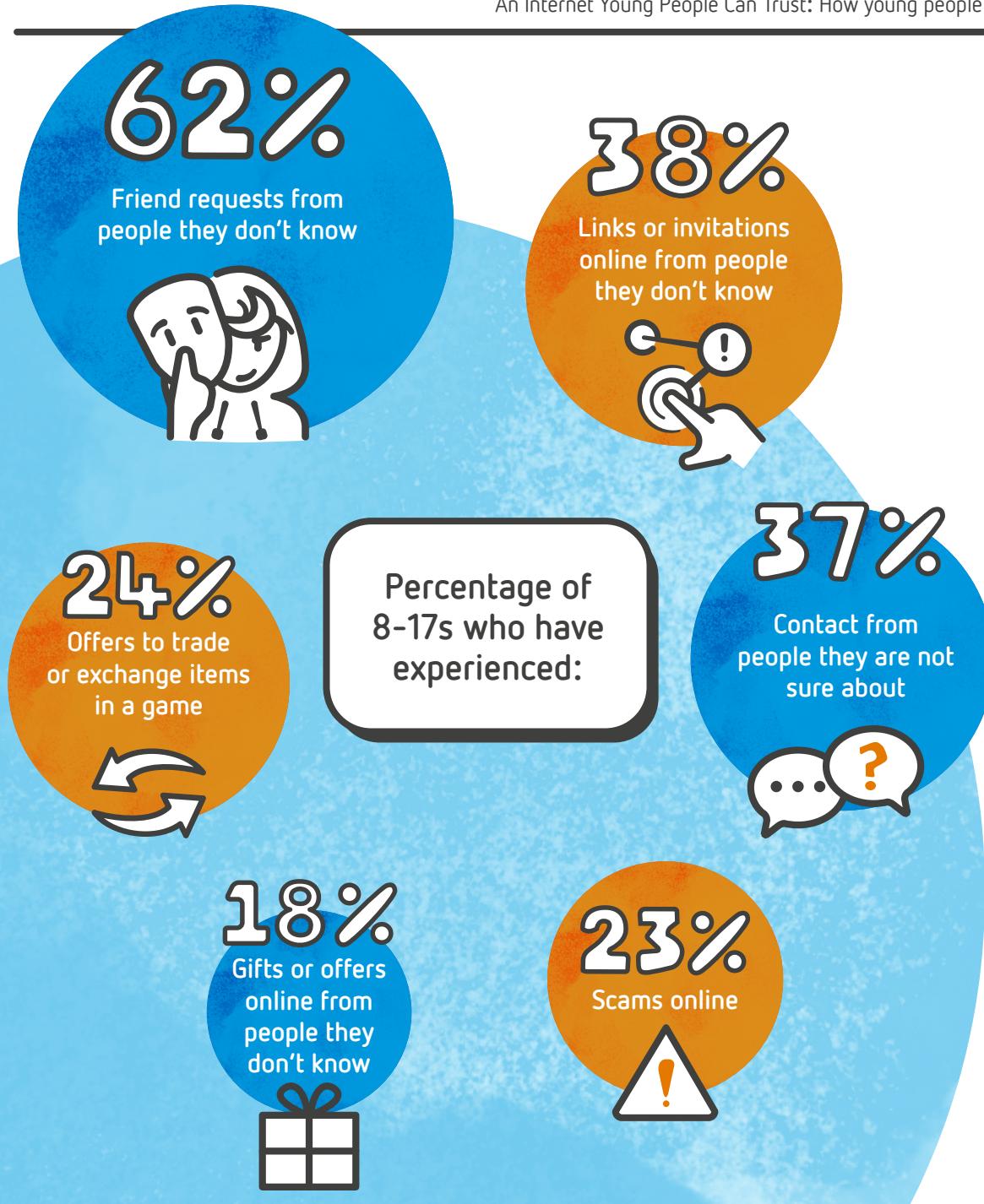
How are young people navigating misleading content online?

While many young people do take a critical approach to the information and images they see online, they are also aware that misleading content online is not always easy to spot. 63% of young people say they would be likely to be tricked by misleading content online.ⁱⁱ In particular, they feel they are most likely to be tricked by stories that aren't 100% true, clickbait or edited or filtered imagery on social media.

"I feel like if a post is flagged and has a link to more information, it inherently means more people will click that link and read a bit about what's actually happening. I personally think they will then make a more informed judgment."

Digital Champion

When looking at how likely young people feel they are to be tricked by these various types of misleading content, there were no distinct patterns across age groups or evidence of confidence generally increasing with age from 8 to 17. This suggests young people of all ages need more support to develop the skills they need to spot misleading content online.

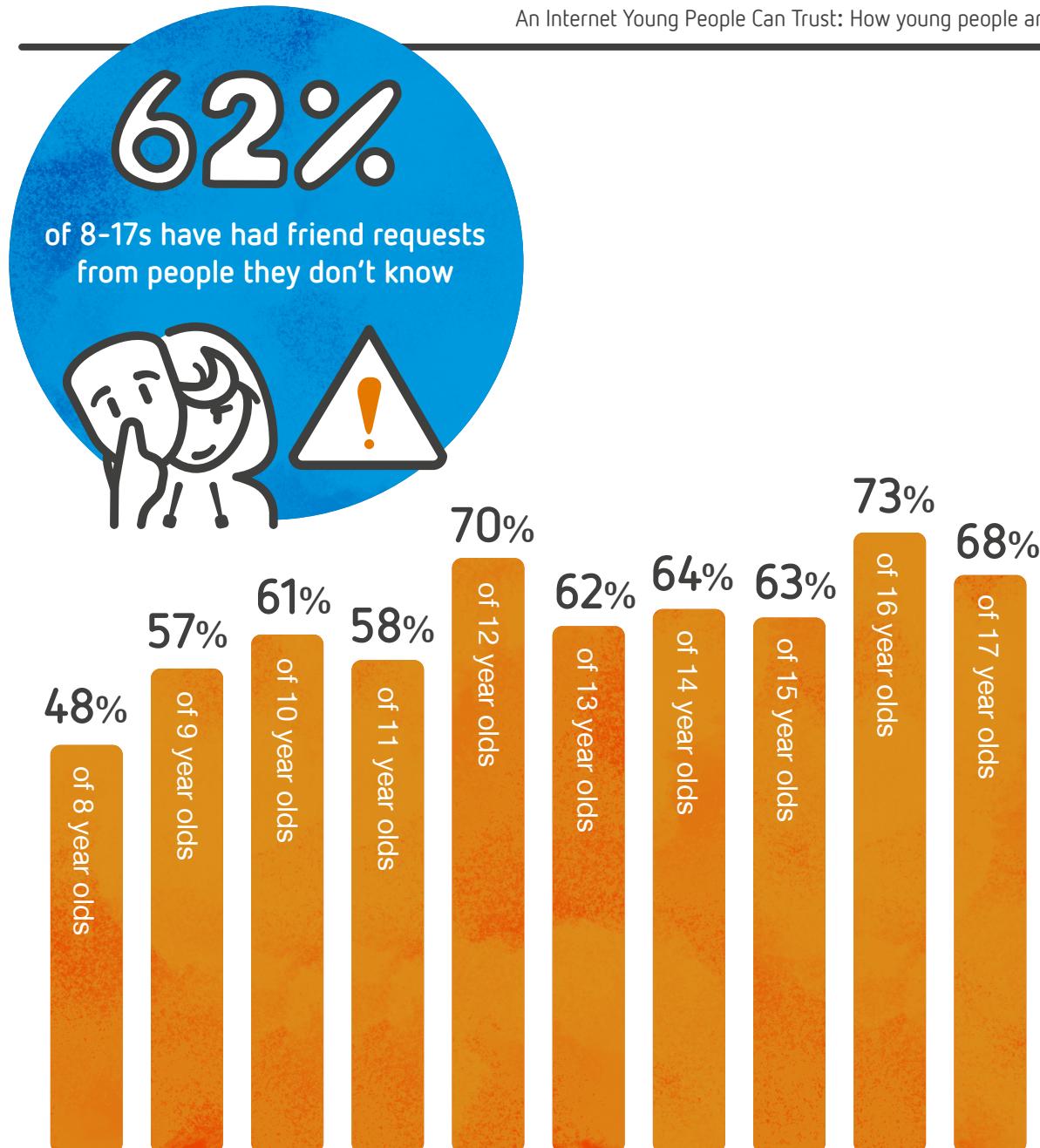


How are young people dealing with approaches from people they don't know?

As well as navigating through misleading content such as hidden ads, clickbait, gaming scams, unreliable stories, edited imagery and forwarded fake news or chain messages, young people must use their judgement to deal with unsolicited approaches. 62% of young people have received friend requests from people they don't know, 38% have received invitations or links from people they're not sure about, 37% have experienced contact from people they're not sure about, 24% have received offers to trade or exchange items in a game, 23% have experienced scams online and 18% have experienced receiving gifts or offers online from people they don't know.

Young people aged 13 and up were generally more likely than younger children to have experienced such approaches while those aged 16 were significantly more likely than average to have experienced several of them; for example, they were 14% more likely than average to experience contact from people they are not sure about, 12% more likely than average to receive either friend requests or links or invitations online from people they don't know and 11% more likely than average to receive gifts or offers online from people they don't know.

More research is needed on these unsolicited approaches that young people are receiving online. We need to better understand what they are receiving, how it is reaching them, how they feel about it and how they are dealing with it, so that young people can be better supported to keep their personal information and themselves safe online.



Percentage of young people by age who have had friend requests from people they don't know.

It is concerning that friend requests from strangers are a feature of young people's time online at all ages. At least half of children at every age between 9 and 17 say they have received friend requests from people they don't know and 48% of 8 year olds say this has happened to them. More than 3 in 10 young people also said they had received either links or invitations online from people they don't know or contact from people they are not sure about, with those aged 13-17 most likely to say this.

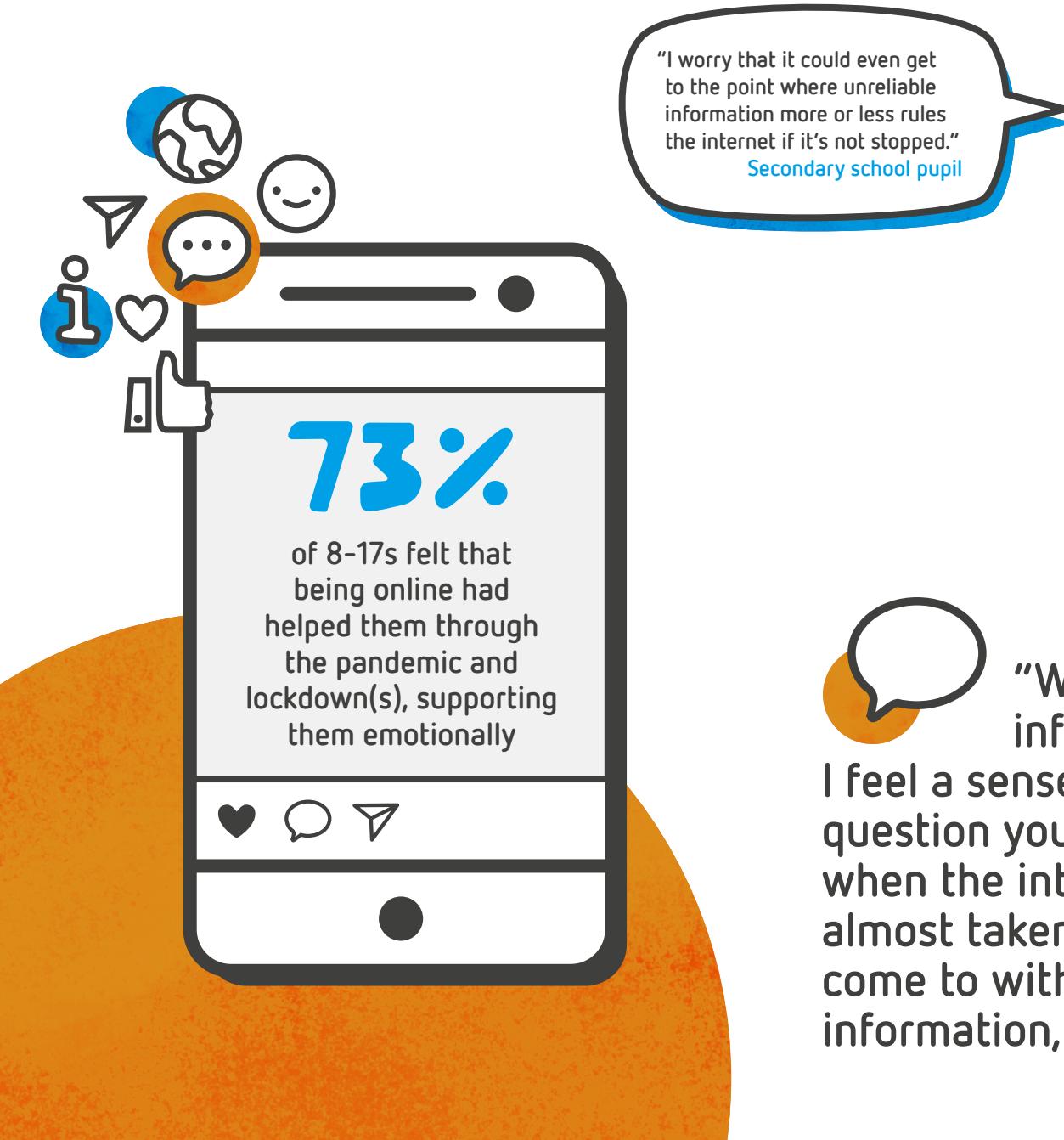
The significantly high number of young people who are saying that they have received either friend requests or some other form of contact from someone they don't know highlights how young people are having to make decisions online that could impact their safety and this is something that should be investigated further. How frequently are young people receiving contact from people they don't know? What platforms are they using when this happens? What do they do when it happens? How do they use their critical thinking to make decisions about whether and how to respond? What is the level of risk involved in these situations? We need to ask young people these questions to fully understand how best to support them and their parents and carers, to keep young people safe online.

Young people and emotional well-being online



Misleading content presents challenges for young people's emotional well-being, often leaving them feeling annoyed, upset, sad, angry, attacked or scared. They also understand that sharing misleading content can be harmful or upsetting for others.

While the online space can present these emotional challenges, most young people value it as somewhere they can build emotional resilience in difficult times. Young people also want to learn more about how to spot misleading content so they can navigate this environment safely and reliably.



A place for emotional support

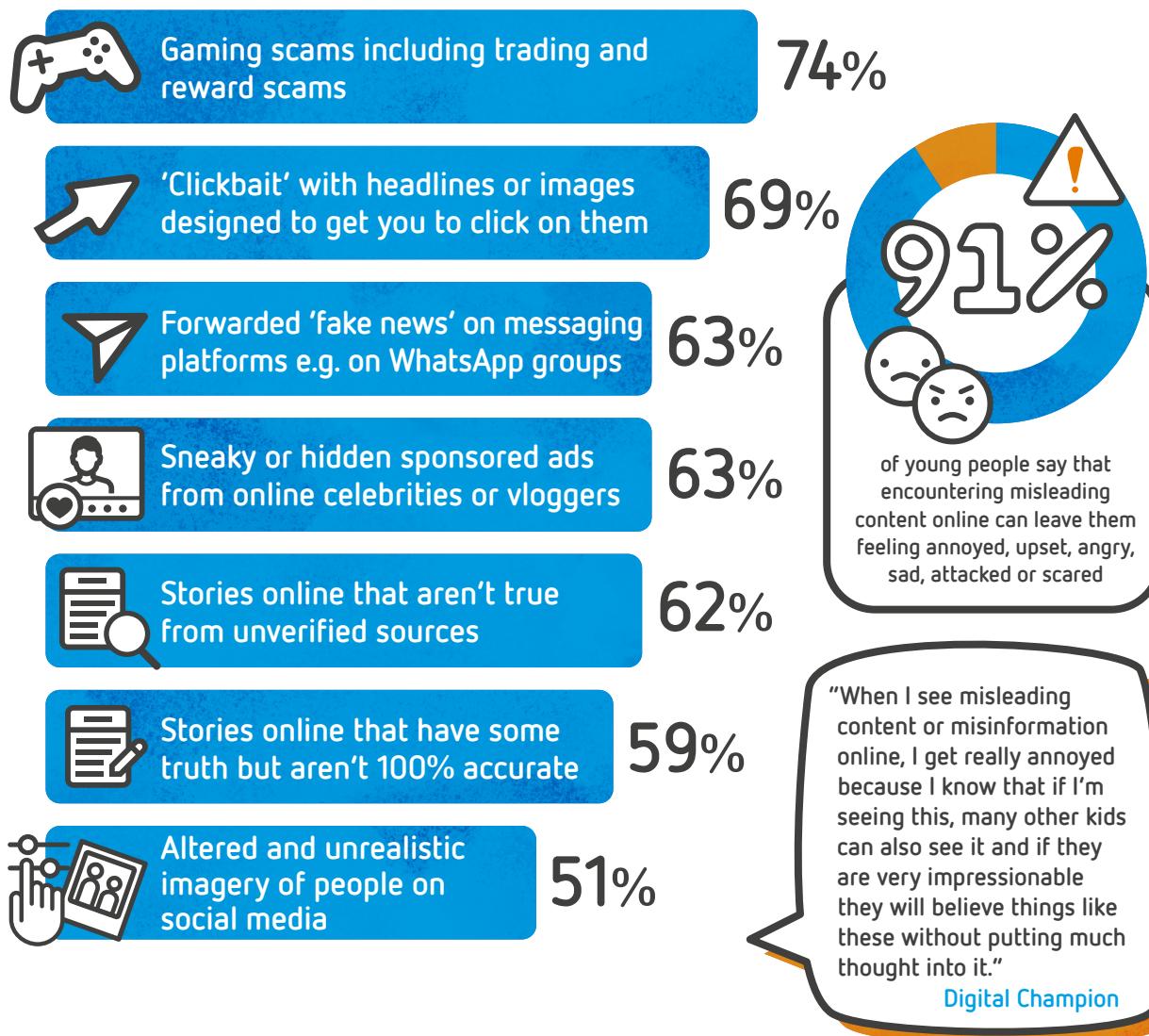
Young people value the online space highly as somewhere they can build emotional resilience in difficult times, with 73% of 8-17s saying that being online had helped them through the pandemic and lockdown(s), supporting them emotionally. This sentiment was echoed across all ages, with at least 68% of all children at each age between 8 and 17 saying that this was the case.

The internet is an incredibly powerful tool that helps young people stay connected to the outside world and their friends, especially in the unprecedented circumstances that we currently face. Repeated local and national lockdowns are drastically limiting the face to face social interactions that young people can have, with potentially significant implications for their mental and emotional well-being; being able to get online has no doubt been a lifeline for many young people. The fact that almost ¾ of young people value online activity as a source of emotional support is also a powerful reminder that being online is now and is likely to remain a significant part of their everyday lives, so we must do all we can to make the internet a safe and reliable place for them to be.

"When I come across misleading information I'm not so much angry but I feel a sense of distrust. When you ask a friend a question you expect them to tell you the truth. So when the internet, which especially nowadays has almost taken over that role of someone you can come to with a question, presents you with false information, I feel a sense of betrayal."

Digital Champion

Percentage of 8-17s who feel or would feel annoyed, angry, upset, sad, attacked or scared as a result of being tricked or receiving misleading content online in the following situations:



How does misleading content make young people feel?

While being online can be an important source of emotional support for young people, encountering misleading content can present challenges for their emotional well-being, with 91% saying it can leave them feeling annoyed, upset, sad, angry, attacked or scared.

Such content includes sneaky or hidden sponsored ads, clickbait, gaming scams, unreliable stories, edited imagery or forwarded fake news on messaging platforms such as WhatsApp groups. When asked how being tricked and receiving misleading content online in various situations does or would make them feel, by far the most commonly selected negative emotional response was 'annoyed', with at least 40% of young people selecting this in relation to all types of misleading content, with the exception of altered and unrealistic imagery of people on social media, which 31% of young people said they felt annoyed by.

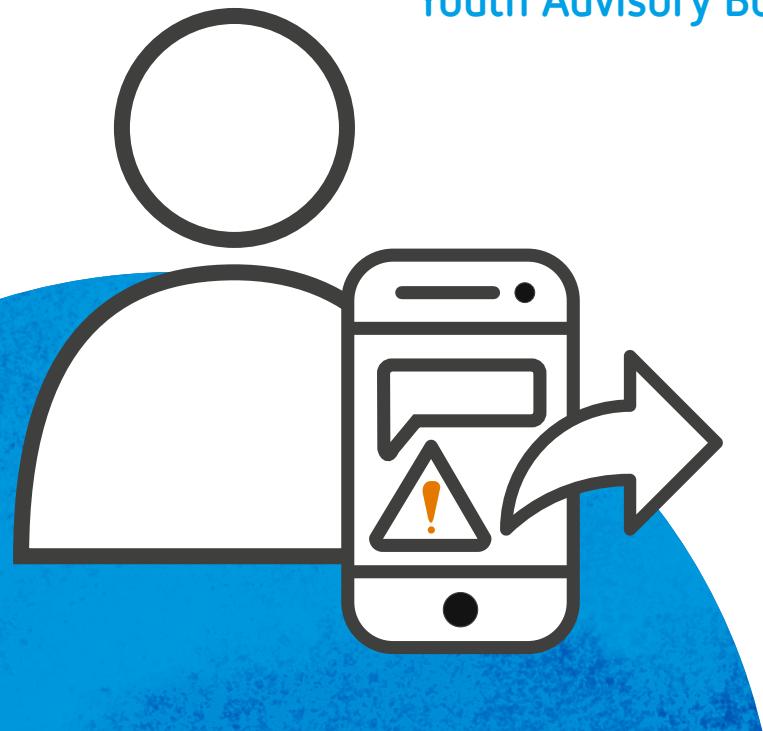
Our evidence suggests that most young people do not worry about being endangered or harmed as a result of misleading content. However, up to 8% of them across ages 8-17 say it makes or would make them feel attacked or scared specifically.

The type of misleading content with the most significant negative emotional impact was gaming scams, including trading scams such as getting asked for items or being scammed into thinking you're going to get a good reward, with 74% of young people saying that being tricked or receiving such gaming interactions makes or would make them feel annoyed, upset, sad, angry, attacked or scared. 'Clickbait' with headlines or images designed to get you to click on them also featured highly, with 69% of young people saying this makes or would make them feel at least one of these negative emotions.



"Although I am mostly able to distinguish between real and false news because I am equipped with the tools to do so, many people would not be able to do so. That concerns me as they could then share this information, possibly to others' detriment."

Youth Advisory Board member



What do young people understand about the impact of misleading content on other people?

Most parents and carers and young people alike say they do not share misleading content online. When asked if they had ever shared content such as a false news story about lockdown rules or content with altered imagery, an overwhelming 80% of parents and carers answered that they had not, as far as they were aware. Similarly, most young people, especially younger children, say they have never shared a misleading post or content, with 69% of all young people saying they had never done so and 78% of 8 and 9 year olds saying they had never done so. The minority of young people who say they have shared misleading content themselves said they did so either for harmless fun, or because they didn't realise the content was fake, or that they shared it because of how unrealistic it was. The fact that the majority of young people are not sharing misleading content highlights a sense of responsibility for their actions online.

Not only are young people taking responsibility to not spread misleading content, but many understand the negative impact that sharing misleading content can take on the emotional well-being of others. 58% agreed that sharing misleading content could be harmful, 55% that it could cause upset or hurt and 35% that it could cause embarrassment.

Everyone's responsibility to build an internet young people can trust

What are young people doing about misleading content?



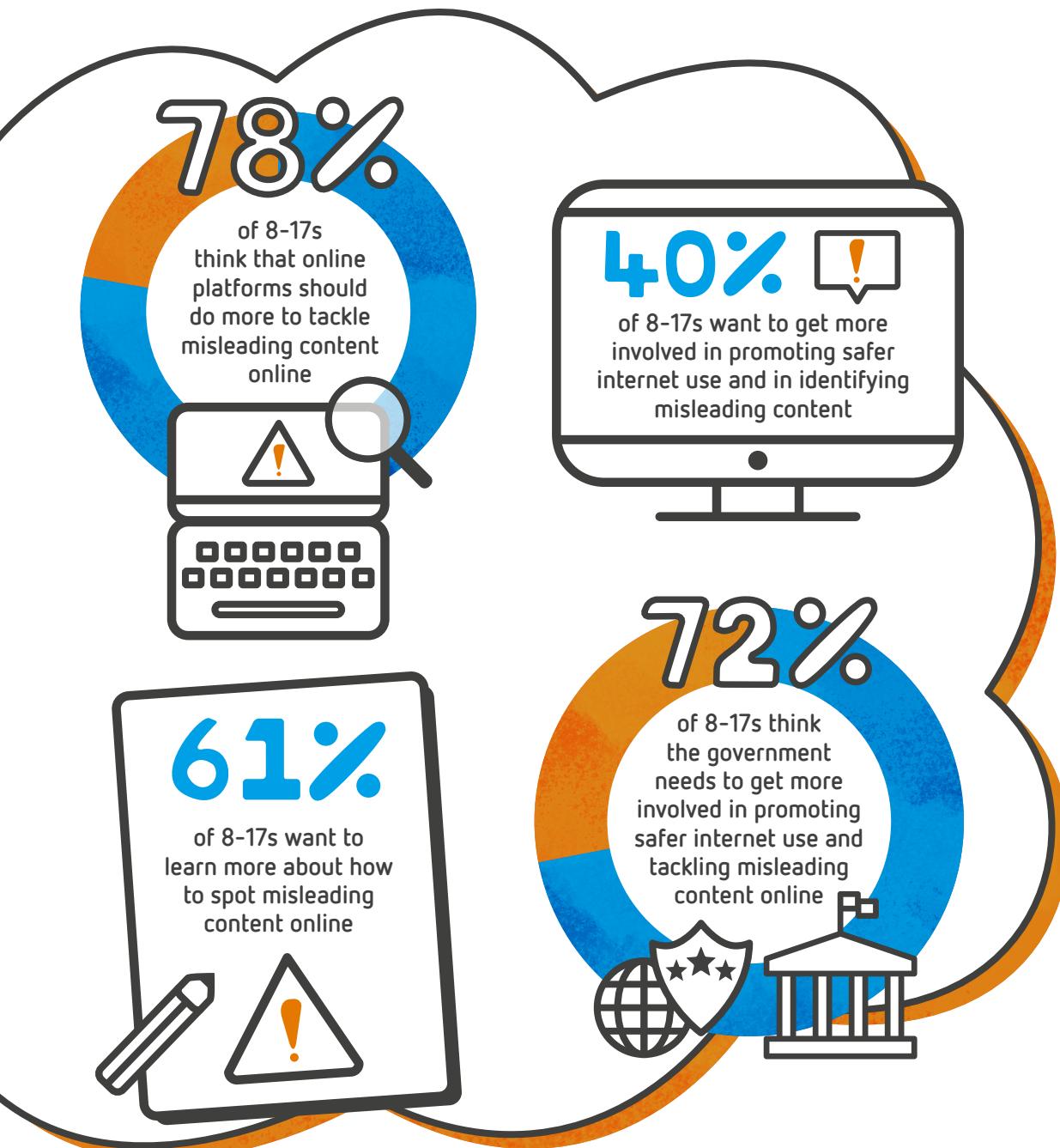
Many young people feel they have a responsibility to educate their friends and family about sharing misleading content online and 'call them out' as and when they share it, with 53% saying they feel this way. Some young people are actually putting this into practice; 17% have noticed a friend sharing misleading content and spoken to them about it and 6% have done the same with a family member.



While many young people do feel they have a responsibility to educate those around them about misleading content, when asked about the numerous actions they are most likely to take when they come across something online that they think might be misleading, they have varied responses. While 48% are likely to ignore misleading content or not do anything in response, some are likely to take a variety of actions. 28% talk to a parent or carer about it, 21% block it and 16% report it. Age influences what they are most likely to do; for example, young people aged 14 to 17 were more likely than average to ignore it or block it. They were also less likely than children aged 8 to 13 to talk to a parent or carer about it.

12% of young people said that, if they came across something online that they thought might be misleading, they would check another online source that they trust, illustrating how some are putting critical thinking skills into action to verify information. Young people aged 14 to 17 were more likely to do this than those aged 8 to 13.

Crucially, young people of all ages show high levels of concern over potentially harmful misleading content; 59% agree they have a responsibility to report it if they see it.



What changes do young people want to see?

Most young people want to be better equipped to navigate the online space reliably, with 61% wanting to learn more about how to spot misleading content online. Many want to actually do more, with 40% saying they want to get more involved in promoting safer internet use and in identifying misleading content.

As well as taking responsibility themselves, young people are clear in their demands for government and online platforms to do more. 78% of young people think that social media and other online platforms should do more to tackle misleading content online and 72% think the government needs to get more involved in promoting safer internet use and tackling misleading content online. There are not significant variations across age groups on either of these points, although the likelihood of young people agreeing that social media and other online platforms need to do more to tackle misleading content does increase steadily with age, with 80% of 17 year-olds feeling this way. The overwhelming message is clear; the vast majority of young people from 8 to 17 are asking government and social media and other online platforms to take action to make the internet safer and more reliable. As lockdowns continue to disrupt education and everyday life and young people spend more time online, this is more urgent than ever before.

i. The following has been calculated by the combining respondents that selected either 'Upset or Sad', 'Annoyed', 'Angry', 'Attacked or Scared' to the following statements: 'Sneaky or hidden sponsored ads from online celebrities or vloggers', 'Clickbait' with headlines or images designed to get you to click on them', 'Gaming scams – including trading scams such as getting asked for items, or being scammed thinking you're going to get a good reward', 'Stories online that aren't true from unverified sources' 'Stories online that have some truth, but aren't 100% accurate', 'Altered and unrealistic imagery of people on social media' & 'Forwarded 'fake news' on messaging platforms e.g. on WhatsApp groups'

ii. The following has been calculated by the combining respondents that selected either 'Very likely' & 'Somewhat likely' to the following statements: 'Sneaky or hidden sponsored ads from online celebrities or vloggers', 'Gaming scams – including trading scams such as getting asked for items, or being scammed thinking you're going to get a good reward', 'Stories online that aren't true from unofficial sources' & 'Edited and filtered imagery from people on social media'.

The internet has been a lifeline for most young people during the pandemic, in terms of their education and social lives but also in helping to provide emotional support.

However, the internet also presents them with challenges around trust and reliability. For instance, almost half of young people are seeing misleading online content regularly. For some of them, this is many times per day.

Young people want to do something about this and have shared their ideas and demands with us. Here is their message.

The UK Safer Internet Centre has worked with young people to develop a Young People's Charter for Safer Internet Day 2021 on how government and online stakeholders can help create a more trustworthy internet.

We have produced this Charter from speaking to primary and secondary age children in focus groups, consulting members of the Youth Advisory Board, Childnet Digital Leaders and Digital Champions, surveying young people, and reviewing the findings from our latest research. This charter of four key points comes directly from the young people we spoke to.

Young People's Charter

We deserve an internet we can trust, and we call on the government and online stakeholders to listen to our voice:



1 Teach safe internet use: More than three-quarters of young people say being online is a more important part of their life than ever before while 65% have enjoyed online lessons during lockdowns. Its role for our generation is clear. Therefore, we are calling on the government to ensure young people receive regular, good quality education about the internet from an early age – and that they incorporate digital media literacy into the school curriculum. We want to be able to safely access and enjoy all that the online world offers and have the knowledge and skills to separate fact from fiction.

"We need to be educated on the risks of misleading content, and more importantly how to identify it, both at home and at school."

Youth Advisory Board member



3 Hold platforms to account: We are calling on the government, website providers, social media platforms and online content producers to do more to tackle misleading content online. Almost 80% of young people would like to see online platforms play their part, while nearly three-quarters feel the government can

do more to ensure the online content we see is safe, reliable and trustworthy. We need to have confidence in the information we access online and be able to easily flag and report misinformation when we see it.

"The government and media companies can create and enforce policies that ensure people are safe from misinformation - and create better awareness, education and funding." **Youth Advisory Board member**



2 Protect us online: Almost half of young people are seeing misleading content every day. This is not acceptable and leaves many of us annoyed, upset, angry, even feeling attacked or scared. We need to ensure all young people are aware of how to recognise misleading online information and know the steps they can take to report, fact-check and evaluate it.

Also, with 62% of young people receiving friend requests from people they don't know, identifying who and what we can trust online is crucial to ensuring we remain safe.

"We want to feel safe when we go on a website or app. It's important for the government to see what's on the internet, monitor it and help to take action."

Primary school pupil



4 Let us help shape the internet: Today, young people use the internet for education, entertainment, keeping in touch with friends and even for seeing family members. We use it to learn more about the world around us and how that world is evolving, meaning it is more important than ever that we are able to trust what we see. Everyone has a responsibility to make the internet a safer place, including us. It is our internet and we want to be involved in shaping its future. Consult us, involve us, help us keep it safe – and take action that helps create an internet we can all trust.

"We should have our say because we are the future, and as we grow we are going to be using social media and the internet even more."

Secondary school pupil



Conclusion



It is clear that young people are spending more time online than ever before and that their online experience is positive in many ways. The internet is an important source of growth, education, communication and emotional support, and young people have told us how much they have valued it through the pandemic that began in 2020. However, increased time online inevitably increases the likelihood that young people will regularly encounter a wide variety of inaccurate, unreliable or untrue content. This content can confuse, manipulate or influence young people and, as 91% of them told us, have a negative emotional impact.

Our research highlighted how many young people of all ages, from as young as 8, are regularly encountering misleading content and have experienced approaches, such as friend requests, from people they don't know. It is vital that all of us involved in building an internet young people can trust consult young people to build a deeper understanding of what they are encountering, how it affects them emotionally and how they respond to it, so we can support them with the tools and skills they need to separate trustworthy from misleading content and to stay safe online.

"It's down to the online companies but also the government because we're electing them to help us and change our lives for the better."

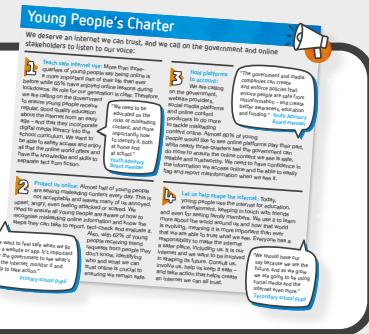
Secondary school pupil

Our Recommendations

► **Young people** want and need an internet they can trust. It is clear from our research that most young people are taking responsibility to avoid sharing misleading content online and to report misleading content that they believe may be harmful. Most young people want to learn more about how to spot misleading content online and many actually want to do more to promote safer internet use and identify misleading content. In short, young people are committed to playing their part in building an internet they can trust. Our qualitative research shows they have valuable experience that we must learn from and ideas that they want to voice in this crucial conversation.

It is vital to consult with young people of all ages, given our research shows that children as young as 8 are regularly encountering misleading content and already experiencing approaches online from people they don't know. We have worked with youth representatives to reflect on our research findings and on their views and harnessed this into the Young People's Charter, included on page 18 of this report. We strongly urge all stakeholders to take the Charter on board and take action, where called to.

Read the Young People's Charter on page 18, where youth representatives have stated their responsibilities and shared their ideas and demands for stakeholders to build an internet young people can trust.



► **Parents and carers** are an important source of support and guidance for young people as they navigate the online space and make decisions about what content can be trusted and how they should respond to something they think may be misleading or even harmful. Our research makes it clear that misleading content can have a negative emotional impact on young people, leaving them feeling angry, upset, sad, annoyed or even attacked or scared.

Regular and open conversations at home with young people about what kind of content they are encountering online, how they feel about it and what they should do, if anything, when they see it will help young people feel supported and able to ask questions and open up when they encounter misleading content and are upset or unsure what to do. Our research shows that misleading content is now part of the daily online experience for children as young as 8; conversations at home must start early. If parents and carers are unsure if their children are seeing misleading content or are troubled by it, Safer Internet Day is a great opportunity to start those conversations.



Our Recommendations

▶ **Schools** are already educating and supporting young people by teaching safe internet use and supporting them to make the most of the online space as a place for education and growth. However, our research shows that most young people want to learn more about how to spot misleading content online and this is an area where schools have an important role to play.

In helping young people develop the critical thinking skills they need to make sound judgements about what is trustworthy online, schools can empower young people to seek and find reliable information and to help keep themselves and others safe from emotional or physical harm online. This education needs to be engaging and it is vital that schools draw on young people's own experiences of their online lives and their ideas to make it relevant.



▶ **Social Media and online platforms** have a crucial role to play in building an internet young people can trust and young people are overwhelmingly asking them to do more to tackle misleading content online. We urge social media and online platforms to heed this call and to respond to the demands of young people outlined in the Young People's Charter on page 18, including protection from the emotional harm and risks to safety that misleading content can present.

On a practical level, young people would benefit from better tools to help them identify, block, flag and report misleading content online, especially where it is harmful. More than this, however, there is an enormous opportunity to learn from the online experiences of young people, who are now spending more time online and seeing more misleading content than ever before. We ask social media and online platforms to not only build better tools to help young people identify and manage misleading content online, but to consult with them and give them a voice as they move forward and take action.

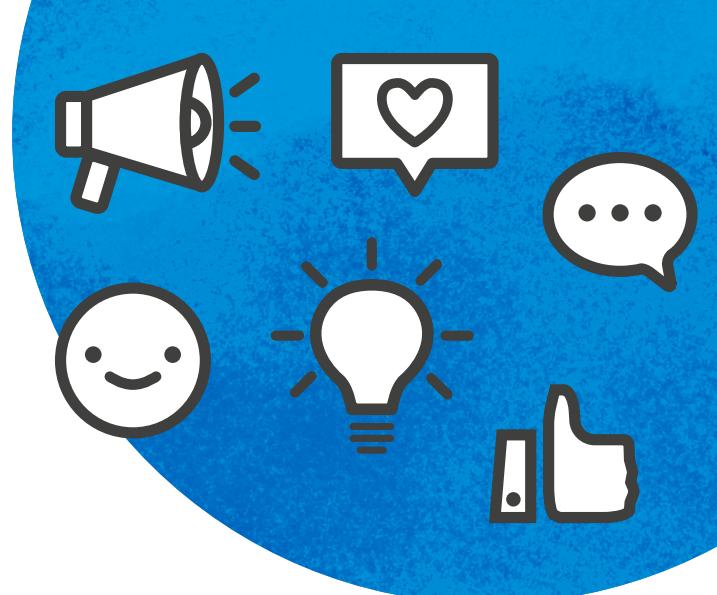
▶ **Government** has a huge opportunity to ensure that the UK's Digital Media Literacy Strategy and education policies and support are firmly geared towards building an internet young people can trust and ensuring that young people of all ages are equipped to be responsible, informed and capable digital citizens. Schools need support in this area, as well as practical resources they can use in the classroom. We now urge government to listen to the clear demands of young people for government to, firstly, get more involved in promoting safer internet use and tackling misleading content online and secondly, to support schools and families so that young people can learn more about how to spot misleading content online.



Young people are taking responsibility to prevent the spread of misleading content and have told us they understand the emotional harm and risks to safety it can cause. Now, more than ever, as lockdowns continue to disrupt education and everyday life, we need to listen to young people, learn from their experiences and let them help us shape an internet they can trust.

Safer Internet Day provides an ideal opportunity to start having those conversations to support young people to get the most out of their time online. We hope that this research and the conversations generated by Safer Internet Day will catalyse action and help our young people develop the skills, knowledge and competencies they need to navigate their online world.





With thanks to



Co-financed by the Connecting Europe Facility of the European Union



@UK_SIC



@UK_SIC



UK Safer Internet Centre

▶ #SaferInternetDay

▶ #AnInternetWeTrust