Ipsos

Ofcom
making communications work
for everyone

ico.
Information Commissioner's Office

Internet users'
online experiences and attitudes

Qualitative research summary

Making
sense
of media

1 Introduction and background

This research was commissioned by Ofcom with advice on the research design provided by the Information Commissioner's Office. It explores public experiences of and attitudes towards the internet, with a particular focus on potential sources of online harm. The research objectives were:

- To understand how people use the internet, their experiences of potential online harm, and their responses to it.

- To explore the types of protection from harm people expect when they go online.

This was an exploratory study, designed to refresh and update understanding about these issues. It involved two strands of research: a series of 16 household case studies and eight deliberative workshops, with additional friendship groups and mini-focus groups to hear from those who may have specific online experiences. Fieldwork was conducted with internet users in all four UK nations between 4th March and 9th May 2019. Further details of the methodology are included in the appendix to this report.

The report is structured in the following five chapters.

2 The complex context for online harm

Everyone uses the internet in their own unique way – making it impossible to generalise about 'typical' internet use

Most participants could not imagine modern life without the internet. Although what they did online varied greatly, their online activities were essential to many aspects of their daily lives and their interactions with others. Most participants were using smartphones to access the internet, even when they owned laptops, tablets or other devices. The internet was often embedded to such an extent that participants did not always recognise they were using the internet, for example by streaming content or playing games.

What participants did online was shaped by their circumstances, personality, and interests, as well as how they felt about using the internet in different ways. Individual experiences were incredibly diverse, with each participant using the internet in their own unique way, mirroring life offline. This variety makes it impossible to generalise about what 'typical' internet use looks like, even among demographic groups.

"Now I don't know what I'd do without it." (Parent, Bristol, household interview)

Despite recognising the benefits, there were common concerns about the online world

Participants identified many important benefits of the internet for them personally, for their family and friends, and for society. For example, middle aged and older participants thought about life back before the internet and emphasised the ease, efficiency and reduced cost of doing things online. Despite these benefits, participants also had strong concerns about the online world. Their worries touched on many different aspects of their lives, and the lives of others, reflecting the extent of their internet use. Participants highlighted worries about harmful conduct (how people treat others online) and harmful content (the types of material that can be accessed online).[1]

Participants found it difficult to know how to protect themselves and their families from harmful conduct in particular

While views about the relative importance of different issues varied, the strongest concerns tended to be about harmful conduct. Participants found it harder to know how to protect themselves and their families from people who want to cause harm to others online. This was often discussed in the context of protecting children and young people but also extended to other vulnerable groups – these are outlined in more detail below.

---

[1] During the workshops, these categories were introduced by moderators as a way of structuring different forms of harm linked to Ofcom's approach to the topic, and have been used during analysis. Participants discussed both forms of harms but did not always use this terminology.

Concerns about harmful content were also widespread and often strong, but these were more familiar to participants. They seemed to understand at least some of the steps they could take to protect themselves and others from potentially harmful content.

Overall, a broad hierarchy of concerns about the online world emerged across the research, summarised in Figure 2.1. Financial scams (including fraud and misuse of personal data), grooming and bullying were particularly concerning for participants, reflecting the focus on harmful conduct. Participants also worried about the impact of the internet on mental health, and children accessing inappropriate content. The two areas we prompted on (fake news and data exchange) did not emerge as important spontaneous concerns. While participants were worried about these issues after considering them in more detail, overall concerns were not as strong. Both topics are discussed further in Section 4.

Figure 2.1: Hierarchy of concerns about online harm
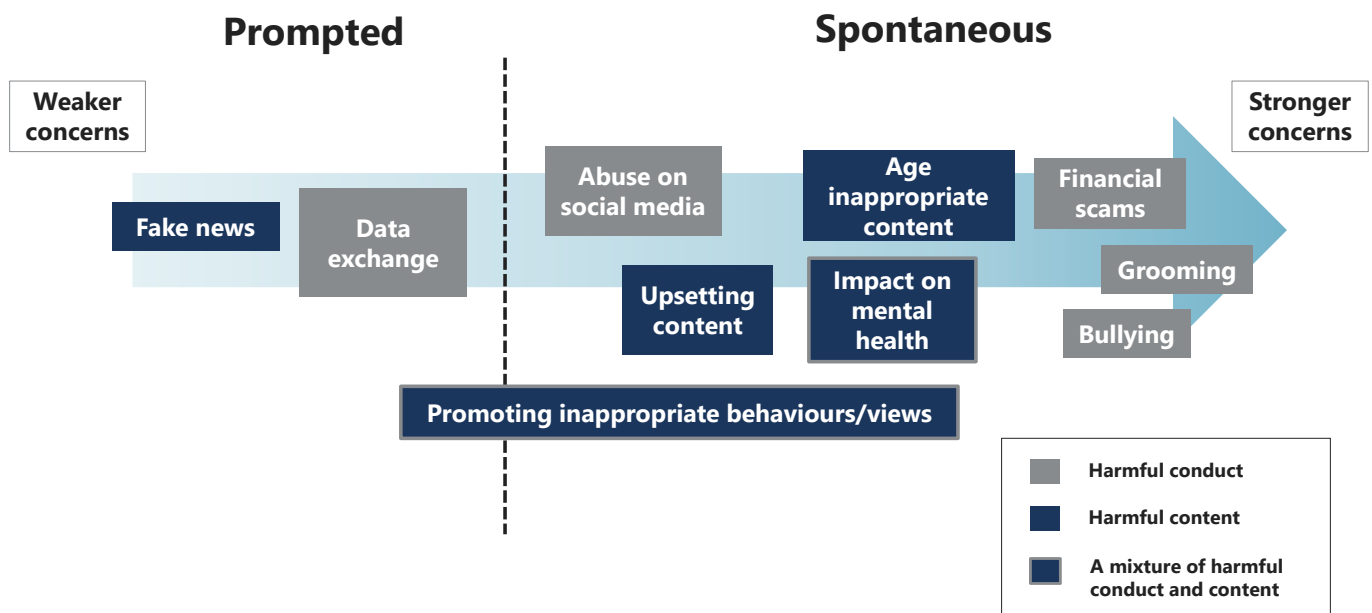
Participants focused on older people and children as being at greater risk online, based on perceptions about the harms they might experience

Two demographic groups were considered most at risk online: (i) children and young people, and (ii) older people. For children and young people, participants identified grooming, bullying and age inappropriate content as particular issues. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5. Concerns about older people focused on financial scams and upsetting content. These groups were considered more susceptible to online harms as they were perceived as being:

- More likely to be targeted by individuals online with malicious intent;

- Less savvy with navigating the online world in different ways;

- Less able to make judgements about what is or is not appropriate content and conduct.

Participants identified some higher risk groups they perceived as more vulnerable because of their situation or how they use the internet

Participants tended not to associate vulnerability to online harm with specific demographic characteristics (other than concerns about age described above). Instead, concerns were more contextual, with people seen as vulnerable based on their personalities, circumstances or experiences. Participants linked these perceived vulnerabilities to people being at risk of harm because of things that might happen to them online.

Examples discussed by participants included:

- **People with a strong online identity** or those who **feel social pressure to be online:** there was general concern about those considered too dependent on the internet for their sense of wellbeing and personal worth. Participants highlighted the negative impact of bullying and abuse on social media in this context, as well as the effect on people's mental health more broadly.

- **People with a specific vulnerability:** participants worried about the potential for online harm to those who had experienced mental health problems or traumatic experiences, or who struggled with addictions that could be exacerbated online. Worries focused on people who might be particularly upset by content that triggered their experiences or who might be influenced by others seeking to promote potentially harmful views or behaviours.

Key features of the online world create the potential for harm, while also bringing many benefits

Participants described several fundamental features of the online world that they thought contributed significantly to online harm. However, participants also acknowledged that these features were responsible for many of the benefits of the internet they valued. They described how these features worked together in different contexts to create the potential for harm (as well as good):

- **Pervasiveness**
- **Scale and speed**
- **Accessibility**
- **Anonymity**

"For every advantage the internet has created, it creates a disadvantage." (Edinburgh, workshop)

Pervasiveness: participants were concerned about the consequences of people being too dependent on the internet in every area of their lives

There was much debate about the role of the internet in modern life. Participants reflected that many people – often including themselves – are reliant on the internet and spend extensive time on online activities. Overall, this was seen as more of an issue for younger people – but not exclusively so.

"I dislike how all-consuming it can be. You can be very easily distracted by various things. What starts out as a quick google search can lead to three lost hours falling down a YouTube/ wiki/ online shopping rabbit hole." (Parent, Glasgow, diary entry)

Scale and speed: participants described potentially harmful content spreading quickly – and being difficult to remove

Participants were worried about problematic content spreading to many people very quickly, including the role of technology in driving this. Many participants also worried that it was difficult to remove online content once it had spread.

"The world could watch what happened in New Zealand...and despite different Forums taking it off the Internet, is seems to be still available. Very Scary!" (Adult, Antrim, diary entry)

Accessibility: participants worried about the ease of finding harmful content – deliberately or accidentally – and the access people have to others online

The ease of accessing information was seen as one of the most important and useful features of the internet. However, participants worried about people seeking out inappropriate content, or coming across this accidentally. This exacerbated concerns about scale and speed. They also highlighted how easy it was for people to access others online, and how this could lead to grooming, bullying, and the deliberate spread of inappropriate behaviours and views.

"I dislike that [the internet is] so accessible and there's lots of scary things out there that [I] worry about protecting my kids from." (Parent, Yates, diary entry)

Anonymity: participants argued that individual anonymity enables harmful behaviour online

Participants argued that individuals behave differently online because of the potential for anonymity. They highlighted a range of concerns from rudeness to bullying and abuse online. There were also concerns that anonymity enabled illegal behaviours, with participants highlighting the risks of grooming and inappropriate contact with children.

"You don't know who you're speaking to, they could be saying they're 15 but they're 50, that to me is a massive concern." (Glasgow, workshop)

These features were linked to a series of assumptions that underpin participants' behaviour online

In describing their online behaviour, participants seemed to make several common assumptions about the online world, often linked to the features above. These were often unconscious and not always articulated directly by participants as they described their online experiences. Even so, they shaped what participants did online, what they identified as harmful, and their expectations for protection online.

The examples in Figure 2.2 outline some of the most common assumptions identified during the research.

Figure 2.2: Assumptions underpinning people's online behaviour

Features of the online world			
Pervasiveness	**Accessibility**	**Scale and speed**	**Anonymity**

Assumptions about the online world

I can't imagine life without the internet	Once something has been shared you can't delete it
You can find anything online – good or bad	I don't really understand how the internet works
Things can spread out of control very quickly	There are people online who want to cause harm
I don't think I should have to pay for online services	You shouldn't trust things online

3　How do people protect themselves online?

Participants took steps to protect themselves and others online – but these were seen as limited

Participants felt that there were steps they could – and should – take to protect themselves and others online. These were skills and actions participants had learned to cope with potential online harm, with many participants describing how they had developed approaches as the internet has become more embedded in everyday life.

"I think as a society, we've got to basically accept [online harms] and get used to it, because the internet is too big for anyone to handle." (Cardiff, workshop)

Participants' responses divided into actions to avoid harm, and actions in response to harm. Actions to avoid harm tended to focus on how participants used the internet and what they did online such as only using trustworthy sites or ignoring requests from strangers. Participants also discussed how they responded to potentially harmful content. Much of this was passive – simply ignoring content or scrolling past. But there were also examples of participants taking more active steps in response to harm, including talking to others and using reporting functions on platforms.
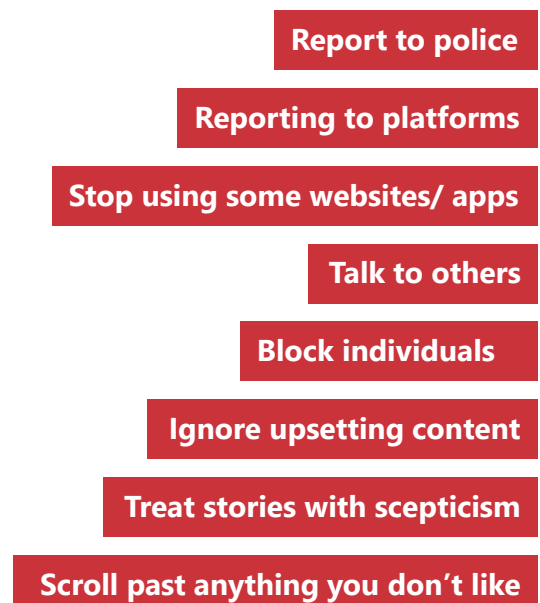
Figure 3.1: Common responses to online harm

To avoid harm

- Block pop ups/ adverts
- Delete browser histories
- Change passwords regularly
- Keep profiles private
- Use anti-virus software
- Avoid sharing personal information
- Restrict access for children
- Ignore requests from strangers
- Only use trustworthy sites

More common actions

In response to harm

- Report to police
- Reporting to platforms
- Stop using some websites/ apps
- Talk to others
- Block individuals
- Ignore upsetting content
- Treat stories with scepticism
- Scroll past anything you don't like

As such, participants were using a combination of individual behaviours, group or community behaviours, and platform or device-led actions to manage the risk of online harm and respond when they came across something they considered harmful.

Individuals were expected to take primary responsibility for protecting themselves online

Participants discussed the importance of keeping personal information safe and thinking carefully about who you interact with online. They also described taking a "common-sense" approach to protecting themselves by avoiding certain websites, or "scrolling past" content. Indeed, some participants did not feel they came across much that troubled them online as a result. However, this approach was not always seen as effective, with participants worrying that it relied too much on individual emotional resilience. Some participants managed this risk by avoiding certain platforms (often social media and gaming platforms) altogether.

Talking about online harms was considered important, particularly for protecting children

As well as individual actions, some group or community behaviours were seen as playing a role in protecting people. For example, parents thought it was important to discuss the potential risks of the online world with their children, even if they did not always feel well-equipped to do so. Parents and children said that these types of discussions often happened in schools, and felt that schools were well placed to support children and their families to better protect themselves online.

Many participants said that they had also discussed online concerns with other members of their family who they felt were less savvy online. They described talking to older relatives about the internet and encouraging them to share anything they were unsure or concerned about. This ranged from seeing upsetting or misleading content to making sure their security settings were up to date.

Participants used functions on platforms and devices primarily to protect their children

The use of platform or device parental controls, locks and filters were widely reported amongst parents. These were largely put in place to control the content that children could access. Parents also mentioned using child-specific devices, profiles and websites.

However, this was less familiar for adults without responsibility for children, who had typically not used these controls (other than blocking users on social media). Indeed, some were surprised that they existed and were interested to learn more. There were mixed views about the effectiveness of reporting functions on online platforms. Some liked being able to flag potentially harmful content or accounts, while others gave examples of using reporting functions but nothing changing as a result.

Feeling in control and feeling out of control led to similar responses to online harm – even if motivations were very different

Throughout the research, there were differences in the extent to which individuals felt in control online, and this also varied for individuals depending on the specific online activity. Overall, some felt savvy about the internet, feeling confident they understood the risks and were therefore in control. These feelings of control were particularly strong if they had no or few bad experiences online. Other participants felt much less in control of what they did online but could see no alternative to accepting

the risks of the internet. This was sometimes linked to bad experiences they had, or that they knew about through others.

However, the relationship between how in control participants felt online and what they did to protect themselves was not straightforward. In some cases, feeling in control led to inaction because participants did not think there was anything to worry about. But for others who felt in control, part of their confidence was because they felt they had put appropriate protections in place. Similarly, those who felt out of control might react with fatalism, feeling there was nothing they could do – or they might put extensive protections in place in an attempt to regain some control over the online world.

4 Exploring online harm in more detail

In addition to exploring spontaneous reactions to online harm, the study explored three topics in more detail: children and young people, disinformation and fake news and data exchange.

4.1 Children and young people

Harms to children were a strong, consistent concern

As highlighted above, children and young people were regarded as a potentially vulnerable group online. This was emphasised throughout discussions by both parents and non-parents – although parents were more familiar with specific types of harm and potential protections. In particular, there were strong concerns about children and young people being exposed to general harms online as well as specific harms such as age inappropriate content. Participants felt that this age group might be more susceptible to online harms, for example not having the skills or experience to protect themselves.

"[It] feels like the most worrying are things that harm children because they're not equipped. For me, those are the most concerning." (Gloucester, workshop)

Perceptions of vulnerability differed by age, with younger teenagers seen as the most vulnerable

While experiences varied, many parents described steps they were taking to protect their children online. They were often more confident protecting younger children, describing how they monitored their online activity and used parental locks and filters to control what young children could see. Even so, there were still concerns about children accidentally viewing inappropriate content, or being exposed to harm through under-age access to certain platforms.
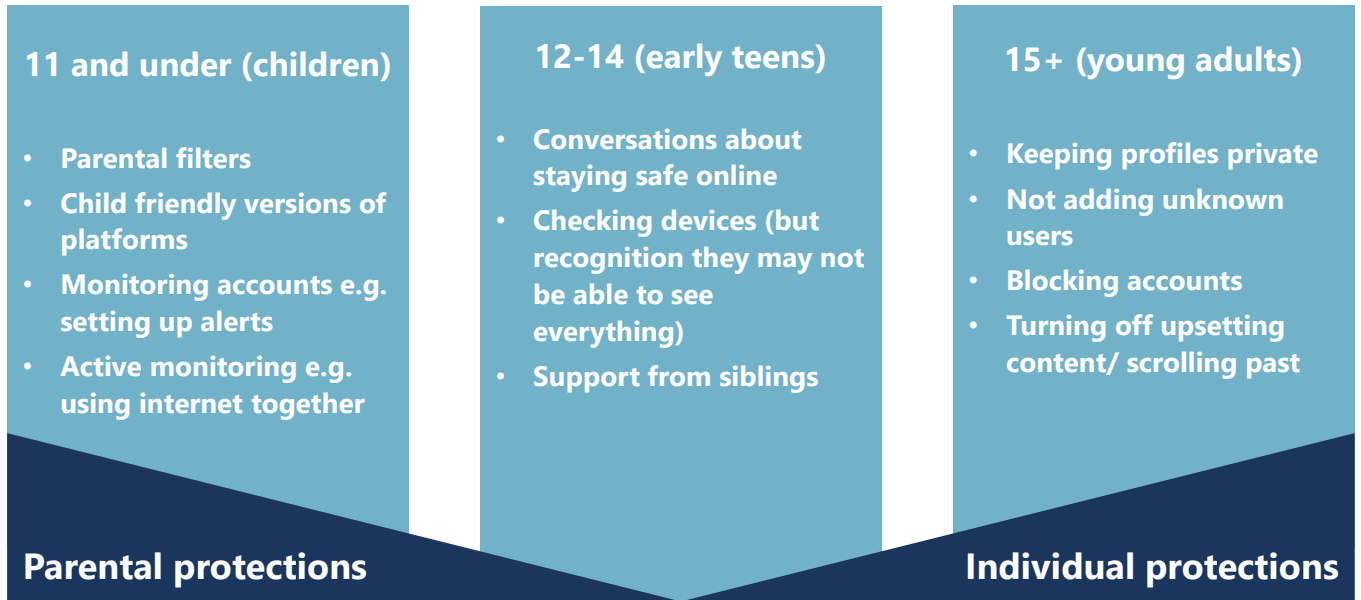
Parents often felt they knew the basics of how to keep their children safe, but were unclear on how to navigate the online world as their children got older. This was seen as particularly challenging during the early teenage years, where young people may have (and seek) more independence, have access to their own devices such as smartphones and might be at greater risk of cyber bullying and peer pressure. In this way, this age group was seen as the most vulnerable - stepping away from parental protections but not necessarily having the skills and experience to protect themselves during a vulnerable stage of life.

Parental monitoring decreased in the early teenage years (12-14)

As children entered their teenage years, some parents hoped the skills they had taught them and conversations they had with their children would equip them to navigate the internet as they got older and took on more individual responsibility. They also described how they asked older siblings to monitor their internet use, or asked adult friends to add children on social medial platforms. Although some parents continued to check their teenagers' devices and monitor them online, they lacked confidence in their ability to do this arguing that their children would find a way around protections. Other parents

were unsure how they could monitor children at this age, and worried they did not know what their children were doing online.

Figure 4.1: Changing protections for children and young people

11 and under (children)	12-14 (early teens)	15+ (young adults)
• **Parental filters** • **Child friendly versions of platforms** • **Monitoring accounts e.g. setting up alerts** • **Active monitoring e.g. using internet together**	• **Conversations about staying safe online** • **Checking devices (but recognition they may not be able to see everything)** • **Support from siblings**	• **Keeping profiles private** • **Not adding unknown users** • **Blocking accounts** • **Turning off upsetting content/ scrolling past**
Parental protections		**Individual protections**

Young people felt confident online although problems were common

Young people themselves felt confident navigating the internet and responding to harmful content and conduct. Although many described personally seeing upsetting content or experiencing harmful conduct, they did not always see themselves as vulnerable or having experienced "harm". Instead, they often seemed to view this as a feature of the online world. They described putting in place protections such as keeping profiles private, blocking accounts and scrolling past upsetting content. Nevertheless, young people worried about those younger than themselves and what they could be exposed to online.

There was also a recognition that young people may not always feel confident to share their experiences of harm with adults, even if they knew it was the right thing to do. This reflected parents' concerns that they did not know what their children might be exposed to online. This uncertainty led many parents to feel out of control and significantly worried about their children's experiences of the internet.

"I had pretty harassing messages before, it really terrified me for months, I couldn't sleep because of it, and it was just online people trying to mess with me... But I didn't want to tell my parents because I thought oh God what will they think about that." (Glasgow, friendship group)

While parents were seen as responsible for protecting children, they wanted greater support to do this effectively

Parents were seen by adult participants across the board as primarily responsible for looking after their children online. This reflected the role of a parent, as well as the subjective nature of deciding on what is appropriate content for a child. However, participants recognised that there could be more support from

platforms and government including greater education to help parents feel confident in doing this. In particular, there was support for age guidance ratings and greater age verification to help parents make decisions about what their children are exposed to. However, there was widespread scepticism about the effectiveness of protections and concerns about the impact greater regulation for children could have on what adults can access online.

"You can't regulate something that the public have access to put stuff onto. Where do you stop? Regulating for children is regulating for us." (Antrim, workshop)

4.2 Disinformation and fake news

There was confusion about the meaning of fake news

Participants discussed examples of both biased and fabricated content, using fake news as a catch-all term for anything that was "not strictly true". They highlighted biased journalism, political perspectives and misleading adverts as examples of fake news. In discussions, participants emphasised how offline content can also be biased and misleading, arguing that fake news is not a new phenomenon and applies both online and offline. Some participants also questioned whether it is possible to assess the veracity of content, arguing that for many topics there is no "absolute truth" which everyone agrees on.

Fake news was not a spontaneous concern and was initially perceived as low risk

There was initial scepticism about the risks of fake news, with participants arguing that other concerns were more significant. Some also emphasised their enjoyment of certain forms of fake news, seeing it as entertaining content. Reflecting this, participants did not consider themselves to have been personally harmed by fake news.

As conversations developed, participants' concerns increased, focusing on the potential harm to society from the spread of fake news. Although there was often confusion about the motives behind fake news, participants worried that it could influence elections or create divisions between different groups. There were also concerns that seeing a false story could plant a seed of doubt in someone's mind, leading them to think the story could be real and influencing their wider perceptions.

"Fake news seems to be making up completely false stories. It's also used by people who want to discredit their opponents by saying they're making it up, and in that case, they probably aren't. It's weird." (Edinburgh, workshop)

Participants assumed they could identify and manage their encounters with fake news

Participants did not tend to see themselves as personally susceptible to fake news, and could not see why they would be targeted with disinformation. However, they worried that other people could be

influenced by fake news, believing in false stories particularly if someone repeatedly saw similar content.[2] In this way, participants were confident they could identify obviously false content and felt able to fact check information they were unsure about.

"If it's totally crazy you know it's not true. If it seems like it could be true you'd check it." (Glasgow, workshop)

Participants also described trusting certain platforms more than others, treating content on some sites with scepticism or using specific sites for credible information. However, during discussions uncertainty grew as to whether they had experienced harm, with participants questioning whether they had been exposed to misleading content or believed false information.

Individuals were seen as responsible for protecting themselves from fake news

Participants argued that individuals had to take the initiative to realise if content is false or not, treating questionable content with scepticism. This was seen as an individual responsibility that extended to not sharing 'fake' content with others in order to stop the spread of fake news. In this way, action was largely taken in response to content perceived as 'fake'. Participants tended not to take conscious steps to prevent themselves from seeing potentially false content.

It was difficult to identify feasible protections from fake news that did not affect online freedoms

Participants struggled to see how fake news could be regulated or what more could be done to protect against misinformation. This reflected the view that the spread of fake news was impossible to prevent due to the speed and scale that content spreads online. Controlling the spread of content was seen as requiring extensive resources that were unlikely to be feasible for platforms and may not result in fast enough response times.

"If you've got 10 million people on Facebook and half of them post something at the same time, how on earth are you supposed to regulate that?" (Cardiff, workshop)

Participants also recognised that making decisions about what content is and is not allowed online could affect freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In this way, although participants felt that independent oversight could have a role in protecting people from fake news, they worried about the long-term implications of this and the power it could give to a regulator. Instead, some participants favoured suggestions to implement a better complaints procedure around fake news or 'safe to share' stamps to support people to make decisions about content.

"Pre-selecting content on your behalf, what does that mean? Someone is already deciding what I want to read?" (Antrim, workshop)

---

[2] This is in line with Ipsos MORI's Global Advisor which found that 66% of the public believe they themselves can spot fake news, while only 28% believe that the average person is able to do so. Ipsos MORI (September 2018), accessed June 2019: https://www.ipsos.com/en/fake-news-filter-bubbles-and-post-truth-are-other-peoples-problems

4.3 Data exchange

Data exchange was not a spontaneous concern and in practice participants accepted it as inevitable online

Participants did not have detailed knowledge of data exchange – referring to the way personal data is collected in exchange for being able to use online platforms and services. Although participants recognised that their online experience was often personalised and had some awareness that personal data is collected online, they often lacked detailed knowledge of how data is collected and used, or for what purpose. As such, data exchange was not a spontaneous concern for most participants. They did not see themselves as having experienced harm in this context. While some were annoyed by personalised adverts, others liked the increased relevance. A few discussed concerns about personalisation based on offline conversations and worried these were being captured by their phone or other smart devices.

As discussions progressed, and participants become more informed about data exchange, they described anxieties about privacy and the misuse of their data. They seemed to take it for granted that they would have to provide some personal data to access a specific service or carry out a transaction. As such, participants were more worried about how else this data might be used without their knowledge and consent.

There was an acceptance that data exchange was a fact of life online, and the tangible benefits – such as being able to access online services, or receive tailored content and discounts – generally outweighed any intangible concerns – such as general worries about privacy and what happens to their personal data. Participants widely assumed there was little they could do to protect their personal data, even if they wanted to, seeing this as an intrinsic part of how the internet works. For some participants, this reflected a tradeoff between providing their data and access to free platforms and services. However, this was not a decision many participants described themselves as consciously making.

"Most people know there's a contract there, you don't get something for nothing, so we have to give something away to get them." (Glasgow, workshop)

Individuals were seen as responsible for protecting their data online

Participants were generally unclear on how to limit the collection of their personal data beyond controlling what they actively posted online, stopping using services, or making profiles private. A small number of participants were declining cookies, using ad blockers or deleting their internet history, but many were unaware of these steps or not concerned about how their data was being used.

"It really freaks you out. I didn't appreciate the extent of it, that it was every single time you go online. It's stored without your consent. All I know is it's for advertising. There must be other ways to use it. We're not informed about it." (Edinburgh, workshop)

There was limited knowledge of privacy policies or the wider rights of individuals online, and few could recall providing consent for their data to be collected and used by specific websites or services. Participants also described finding it difficult to take action due to the limited competition among providers, the length of terms and conditions and the risk of being prevented from using a site.

"I accept all the cookies but I don't know what it means. If you don't you can't get onto what you're trying to see." (Newcastle, workshop)

Participants wanted regulation to focus on making platforms provide useful information

Reflecting the knowledge barriers described by participants about data exchange, they wanted regulation to focus on making platforms provide accessible, concise information about how data is being collected and used. This was seen as a way of helping individuals to make informed decisions about their personal data, including shortening terms and conditions, providing information in simple language and increasing transparency about how data is collected and used. However, participants struggled to imagine how they could genuinely have more choice and control over their data online if they wanted to continue using online services they valued. They resisted suggestions for paying for services that collected less data.

5   What does this mean for protecting people online?

Participants were surprised at how few rules there are to protect people online

Most participants had not really thought much about rules in the online world, other than some awareness of laws protecting personal data and other criminal activities. They were often surprised at how few rules there were when it came to online content in particular. While some participants thought limited rules were an inevitable feature of the internet, others argued that this was not acceptable and something should be done to address their concerns.

Participants wanted more protection online, with strong support for independent regulation and platforms doing more

Overall, there was support for greater protection for people online. Many participants wanted stronger regulatory oversight of online content, platforms and services, although there was no consensus on what that would look like in practice. Participants were asked to discuss a number of ideas for online protection – these included different kinds of content tagging and moderation, better reporting functions, greater transparency about potential harm, and options for people to take more control of what they see on platforms. While the pros and cons of each were only explored briefly, there was support in principle for a broad range of ideas.

In particular, there was clear support for platforms doing more to protect those who use their services. Participants emphasised tools that would equip people to better protect themselves and others (including children) online. However, the reliance on services and platforms developing and implementing their own rules was not seen as sufficient to tackle participants' concerns. Instead, participants wanted some kind of independent oversight and enforcement.

Participants were sceptical about the feasibility and effectiveness of further protections

Despite this, participants were generally sceptical about how well proposals would work. They raised three questions – one general, and two specific to particular types of online harm:

- **Will these work in the real world?** Participants identified practical and technological barriers they thought would get in the way of many of the proposals. They also worried that online services and platforms would be unwilling or unable to implement some of them without undermining their commercial interests. This was an overall concern about the different potential protections.

- **What would effective protection for children mean for adults?** Participants were concerned that protections designed to reduce the risk of harm to children might limit what adults could do online. They also worried that children would find a way around the protections in any case, making the drawbacks for adults less worthwhile.

- **What would tackling fake news mean for freedom of speech?** Although there was support for taking steps to address fake news, some participants worried about the consequences for freedom of speech and access to information.

Reflecting this scepticism, participants assumed that individuals taking responsibility would remain crucial for protecting people from online harm. Linked to this, they often felt they did not understand the issues well enough to say what the right balance between protection and freedom should be in different contexts.

6 Appendix

Methodology

A qualitative research design was developed to explore the attitudes and experiences of internet users, centred around two strands of research. Both strands took place across the UK, with fieldwork conducted in all four UK nations between 4th March and 9th May 2019.

When considering these findings, it is important to bear in mind what a qualitative approach provides:

- It explores the range of attitudes and opinions of participants in detail;

- It provides an insight into the key reasons underlying participants' views;

- Findings are descriptive and illustrative, not statistically representative;

- Participants are provided with detailed information and thus become more informed than the general public.

Strand 1: 16 household case studies + 3 friendship groups

The first strand involved 16 household case studies. The sample included parents, children and young people, as well as those living in households without children. A full sample breakdown is provided below. Each case study started with a telephone interview with the lead adult in the household to find out more about how they access the internet, the composition of their household and to explain the research process including how to use the online app diary. Up to three members of each household then kept a diary of their online experiences over two weeks, before being visited by a researcher to explore their perspectives in greater depth. In-home interviews drew on observational exercises to capture how participants navigated the internet and what they saw when they did. This was supplemented with friendship groups with young people and their friends in three of the same households involved in the wider research.

Strand 2: 8 workshops + 6 mini focus groups

The second strand of research involved 8 workshops and 6 mini focus groups conducted across different parts of the UK. The workshops comprised c.25 adult participants reflective of key demographic characteristics in the UK. During the workshops, participants were split into smaller groups based on age to facilitate in-depth discussion. A deliberative approach using stimulus materials and examples was used to build participant understanding and encourage open discussion about the topic. The design was tested in an initial pilot with 7 participants.

Each of the mini groups brought together 4-6 participants from similar demographic backgrounds. The demographic groups covered those who might be considered to be vulnerable in some way:

- Young people (one group with those aged 16 and one group with those aged 18)

- Parents with low income and levels of educational attainment (two groups)

- Older people (65+) with low income and levels of educational attainment (two groups)

Broadly the sessions covered:

- Introductory discussion of online behaviour and media consumption incl. what participants normally use the internet for

- Discussion exploring potential types of online harms incl. wat worries participants about the internet

- Discussion on regulating online content and conduct incl. what participants are currently doing to protect themselves online and who they think is responsible for protections

- Deep-dive topics:

  - Harmful online content and conduct in relation to children, young people and vulnerable groups

  - Disinformation and fake news

  - Data exchange and advertising incl. misleading adverts and data misuse

Each discussion covered two of the three deep-dive topics.

Sample structure

To capture the diversity of views in the adult population, the research involved a sample of over 250 participants through workshops and individual in-home interviews.

The locations for the workshops covered all four nations of the UK and a mix of city, town and more rural places: Swansea, Cardiff, Antrim, Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Gloucester, Newcastle, and a pilot in London. The 16 household case studies took place in five locations: Yates/Bristol, Birmingham, Antrim, Glasgow, Cardiff.

Strand 1: 16 household case studies + 3 friendship groups

A mix of households were chosen for the household case studies: 4x households without children, 6x households with children aged under 11 and 6x households with children aged over 11. Demographic quotas were also set to ensure the sample included 3x non-white British households and 3x participants aged over 65 (including one participant aged over 75).

Location	Household composition (primary quota)
Birmingham, England (4)	2x households with secondary school aged children 2x households without children
Yates/Bristol, England	1x household with secondary school aged children 1x household with children aged under 11 1x household without children
Glasgow, Scotland (3)	1x household with secondary school aged children 1x household with children aged under 11 1x household without children
Cardiff, Wales (3)	1x household with secondary school aged children 1x household with children aged under 11 1x household without children
Antrim, Northern Ireland (3)	1x household with secondary school aged children 1x household with children aged under 11 1x household without children
Total 16 household case studies	**6x households with secondary school aged children** **6x households without children (including couples, people sharing and those living alone)** **4x households with children aged under 11**

Online app diaries

Across the households, adults and children were invited to participate in an online diary over two weeks. Two versions of the diary were developed, one for those aged over 15 and a child friendly version for those aged 14 and under. In total:

- 3 x 11-14 year olds completed the children's app

- 5 x 15-18 year olds completed the adult app

- 23 x 18+ year olds completed the adult app

Friendship groups

Three friendship groups were held with young people involved in the household case studies and their friends. Lead participants were asked if their household would be happy to host a friendship group, and were asked to contact the friends of their older children to see if they wanted to take part. Information sheets were provided to participants to help explain the research, and consent was gained in advance of the discussions. This information was repeated at the start of the group, confirming consent to participate.

Location	Group age	Group gender
Yates/Bristol, England	14/15 year olds	Male
Glasgow, Scotland	17 year olds	Mixed
Cardiff, Wales	13, 15 & 17 year olds	Male

Strand 2: 8 workshops + 6 mini focus groups

Per workshop location, the sample broadly reflected the region where the deliberative research was taking place. The sample structure ensured that the research was reflective of the UK adult population in terms of the following characteristics:

▪ **Age group**: quotas were set to ensure the age of participants broadly reflected the national profile of those aged over 18 in the following age groups, with at least 10 x 18-34, 10 x 35-49, and 8 x 55+.

▪ **Gender:** quotas for gender were set, with at least: 12 x Male, 12 x Female

▪ **Socio-economic group:** quotas for socio-economic group were set, with at least:

- 7 x ABs

- 7 x C1s/C2s

- 7 x DEs

The table below sets out the total achieved numbers for each of the workshops.

		Swansea	Antrim	Edinburgh	Cardiff	Glasgow	Gloucester	Newcastle	Belfast
Gender	Male	14	16	14	13	11	12	13	12
	Female	14	12	10	12	11	13	12	12
Age	18-24	6	2	5	2	5	3	3	0
	25-40	4	13	7	10	5	8	12	11
	41-60	13	11	8	11	7	12	6	10
	61+	5	2	4	2	5	2	4	3
Ethnicity	White	27	28	17	19	16	21	16	23
	Eastern European	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
	Asian/ Asian British/ Mixed	-	-	3	6	3		8	-
	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British/Mixed	1	-	4	-	3	3	1	-
Number and age of children	Children living at home	13	23	12	12	11	10	12	17
	No children living at home	15	5	12	13	11	15	13	7
	Total participants	28	28	24	25	22	25	25	24

Mini-groups

6 mini-groups took place in Harrow, Leicester and Cardiff with young people, older people with low incomes and parents with low incomes. The table below sets out the total achieved numbers for each of the mini-groups.

		16 year olds (Harrow)	Low income parents (Harrow)	Low income parents (Leicester)	Low income over 65s (Leicester)	18 year olds (Cardiff)	Low income over 65s (Cardiff)
Gender	Male	3	2	3	3	3	3
	Female	2	3	3	3	2	3
Ethnicity	White	3	4	4	6	5	6
	Eastern European	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Asian/ Asian British/ Mixed	-	-	2	-	-	-
	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British/Mixed	2	1	-	-	-	-
Number and age of children	Children living at home	-	5	6	-	-	-
	No children living at home	5	-	-	6	5	6
	Total participants	5	5	6	6	5	6

About Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute

The Social Research Institute works closely with national governments, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its c.200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. This, combined with our methods and communications expertise, helps ensure that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.

www.ipsos-mori.com
http://twitter.com/IpsosMORI