

Online Reputation - Safer Internet Forum 2011:

Coordinated by the EU Kids Online and Insafe

Who were present at the session (what kind of actors)?

Insafe, EU Kids Online, NGOs (Childnet, Save the Children Italy), members of the Youth panel, Parents' panel, Industry (Facebook, Kaspersky Security)

The issues

Reputation is a social phenomenon, is created by us for our peers but it is also created by our peers for us: it is not only what we post online and say online, it is also what other people post online about us. Privacy is more contextual in user-based media environment and the public/private binary is less clear cut.

Reputation has to do with our digital fingerprints, our 'cyber past' and is strongly dependent on the main features of public life online, namely the persistence, searchability and replicability of online information

Reputation also implies issues of digital literacy and skills, awareness raising, risky practices, self-disclosure and trust.

Contrary to most common sense assumptions on children and the internet, young people do care about their privacy (eg. evidence from the US shows that 81% of young people 76% of adults) and are concerned with their online reputation.

As regards the impact of online reputation on their future, children and parents are divided: children are more concerned with the impact of their 'cyber past' on their career (university admission, employment, being monitored by employers) and long-term impact. Parents instead are more concerned with online threats and immediate effects.

The management of online reputation has become more challenging with the widespread adoption of SNS. Public doesn't necessarily mean risks, and being visible online provides young people with undoubted benefits in terms of self expression, networking and participation

However managing online reputation requires skills and literacy that children might not possess. Nearly one third of European children have a public profile. Some children, specially younger ones, lack some basic safety skills such as changing the privacy settings of their profile, and blocking and unwanted contact, as the EU Kids Online data show.

Moreover, those who have a public profile are more likely to disclose personal information: 18% younger and 23% older post their address or phone number.

Young people also engage in some risky opportunities on SNS: 40% have looked for new friends, 34% have added to their online contacts people they have never met face to face

Some risks they encounter have to do with personal information: children can experience fraud, identity theft and personal information misuse. Children on SNS are also more exposed to sexual content, sexting, bullying and meeting online contacts offline than children who are not SNS users.

More skilled children are more exposed to online risks but skills help children reduce the harmful consequences of the risks they encounter online. Younger children, those lower on the ladder of online opportunities and in self-efficacy, are more likely to adopt fatalistic responses to risks (such as stop using the internet for a while, hope the problem would go away). More effective coping strategies include communicative responses, which relies on having social support from people you trust, and proactive responses such as blocking unwanted contact and content, which require available user friendly technical tools and the skills to employ them.

So empirical evidence suggests that in order to empower children and promote their resilience to risks awareness raising, education, but also user friendly online tools and safer online environments are required. Youth panel members point out the importance of designing safe environments: when privacy settings take too much time to take up it doesn't work. It has to be simplified

Industry has incorporated the need to protect children in some way: for example Facebook has recently improved their privacy settings giving more opportunity to users to keep their identity under control. Teenagers profiles on Facebook are set private by default, and they cannot turn it into public, unless they lie on their age. So incorrect age is still an issue that must be addressed, and quite a common practice among their friends according to Youth Panel members.

Technical tools to monitor online reputation such as Google's new 'me on the web', safetyweb (to monitoring what's public on the web) and United Parents (to monitor online private activity) should be improved, made more accessible and possibly embedded into social media.

Group work:

- what are the key messages?
- Do we have the resources we need?
- How can we maintain a positive online reputation?

Work group 1: the key messages

Two main messages: 1. The message whenever it is on online reputation is for of all us, not just for children

2. you want to be in control of your data, you are in charge of it. It is a matter of responsibility, you own your identity so you should maintain that ownership. Young people should ask themselves how does what they do and say online say about them: don't say anything online that you wouldn't say offline. Use your head and think twice before doing something. What you post online can be received differently from what you meant. We are all individuals, we are dealing with very very different ways to use social media.

work group 2: resources

The group, and especially young people, recognize the wide availability of informational resources and awareness raising materials, from videos to flyers, to websites and books. But the problem with it is that most children don't get to know it because they are not told about these campaigns and educational resources in schools. Taking care of online reputation is not a topic discussed a school. A good practice comes from Estonia, where the youth panel engages other children in different schools on these issues.

Moreover, young people are too lazy to look for information on themselves, or, better said, they have much more interesting things to do in their leisure time than taking care of their online privacy.

Cultural differences in the approach to privacy also emerged from the discussion: in Netherlands privacy is perceived as boring and not valued vs Germany lots of resources devoted to online safety. The most valued awareness raising material is videos, and especially films with a twist of humour as it has been done in Norway with the 'You decide' (a privacy campaign for young people is a joint project by The Norwegian Board of Technology, The Data Inspectorate and the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training) and 'use your head' (Telenor Norway against cyberbullying) campaigns.

So what we need is a professional approach to deliver information to young people in a not boring way.

Schools are important settings to reach pupils so teachers should be encouraged to engage in awareness raising in terms of their professional reputation. An helpline designed to support professionals working with young people (teachers, youth workers and social workers) would be helpful. But the key element is to try to bring in also the parents.

workgroup 3: how to maintain a positive online reputation

Offline you tell different things to your friends than those you say to your colleagues and professional networks. A similarly when online, things you want to share with your friends you don't want to share with your mother in law.

This requires more control over online privacy settings: the possibility to have multiple accounts, or the possible to share different thing with different networks of people. This is not about online reputation but on how to manage your privacy

The point is raising awareness about managing one's reputation.

Very expensive tools such as reputation.com and other services like that are helpful but it is very hard when something happens to have it back. It takes many actions to build a good reputation, but it takes only one bad action to lose it." (Benjamin Franklin) We have to counterbalance negative content with positive content: get more active online, create a blog or website etc.

You have to be more present on the internet so that there is a variety of information on you

New challenges for internet safety: address issues of self-disclosure and trust, because online reputation is about it.

How much this is a matter of education and awareness raising, and how much is a matter of online tools?

Summary

Actors

Industry: Social network sites companies should provide easy to use mechanisms for reporting any inappropriate content or contact: They should protect children by making their profiles private by default, and empower children through simply, user-friendly privacy settings. Challenges: under age use and incorrect age prevent from identification of all children, thus limiting the benefits of online tools.

NGOs: provide useful resources for children, teachers and parents, to promote their awareness on privacy and online reputation. They should also act with institution to set the agenda and make reputation an issue of public debate. Challenges: resources are already available, professional delivery of resources is still needed. Best practices: Childnet helpline for professional working with children, Norwegian campaigns 'You decide' and 'Use your head'

Schools: are the best context to engage children and promote their awareness. Challenges: privacy and online reputation are not common topics in European schools. How to engage teachers? Teachers should be properly motivated towards awareness raising activities, though their professional engagement or contests.

Parents: parents alone lack the resources to engage their children. Parents can be sensitized to issues of privacy and reputation through the use of humorous campaign materials such as in the Two Norwegian campaigns above mentioned.

Youth: young people recognize that care for their online reputation is unevenly distributed among peers. Children should be fruitfully employed in raising

awareness through peer to peer exchanges. Best practice: the Estonian Insafe node.