

MEDIA LITERACY

MEDIA

Social Networking

Attitudes, behaviours and use

Social networking seminar: 7 April 2008

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Why have we done this research?

Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003 requires Ofcom to promote media literacy

Forms part of Ofcom's ongoing research into key trends and evidence base to define future priorities

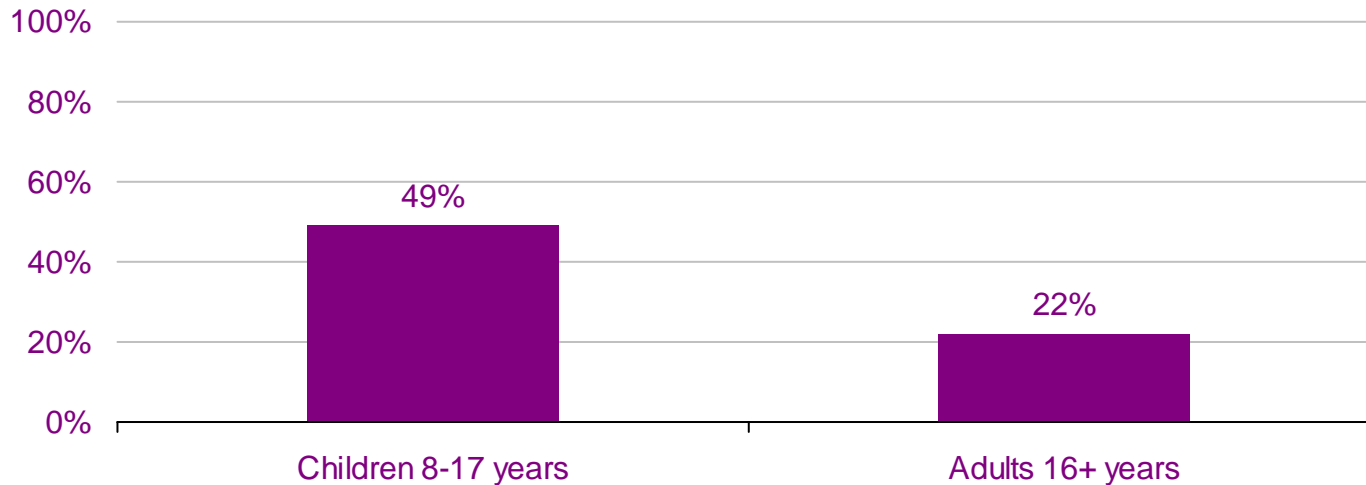
Supports our submission to the Byron review

Research objectives

- To set social networking sites in the wider media literacy, online and communications context
- To profile the use of social networking sites
- To understand people's use of social networking sites
- To investigate concerns about privacy and safety.

Nearly half of children and one in five adult internet users have a profile on a social networking site

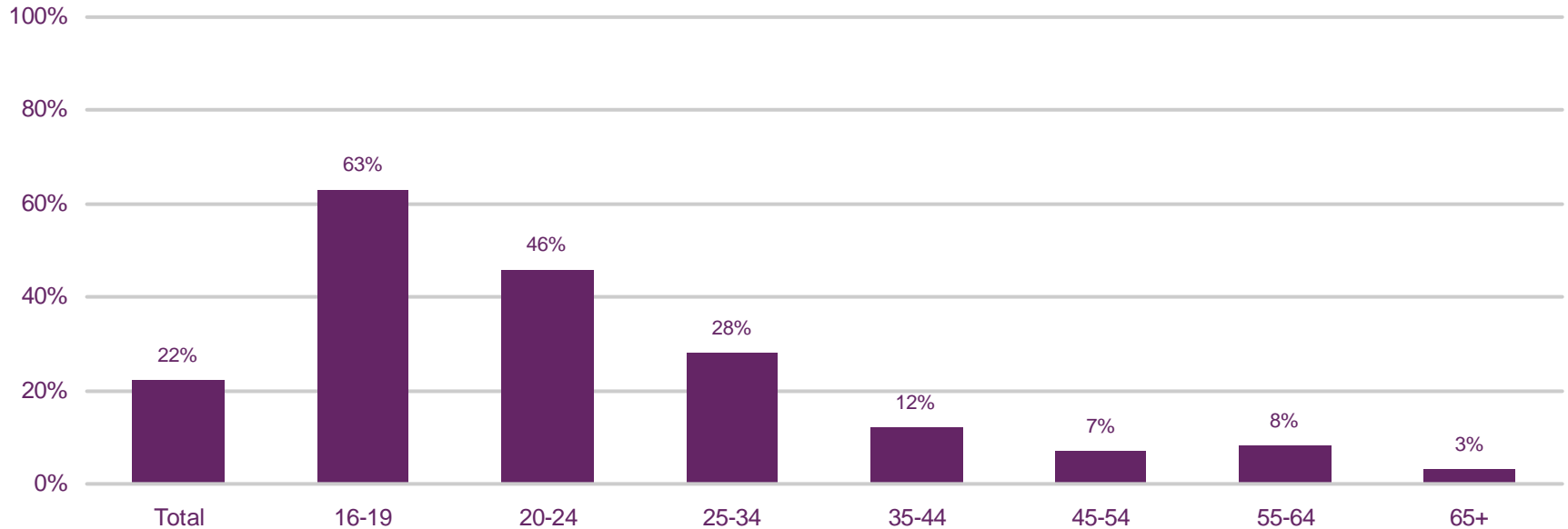
Percentage of adult and child internet users who have a social networking profile



Base: All aged 16+ who use the internet at home or elsewhere (n=1723) and children aged 12-15 who use the internet at home (n=734)
Source: Ofcom research, fieldwork carried out by Saville Rossiter-Base in October-December 2007

Nearly two in three 16-19 year old internet users have a profile on a social networking site

Age profile of adults who have set up a profile on a social networking site



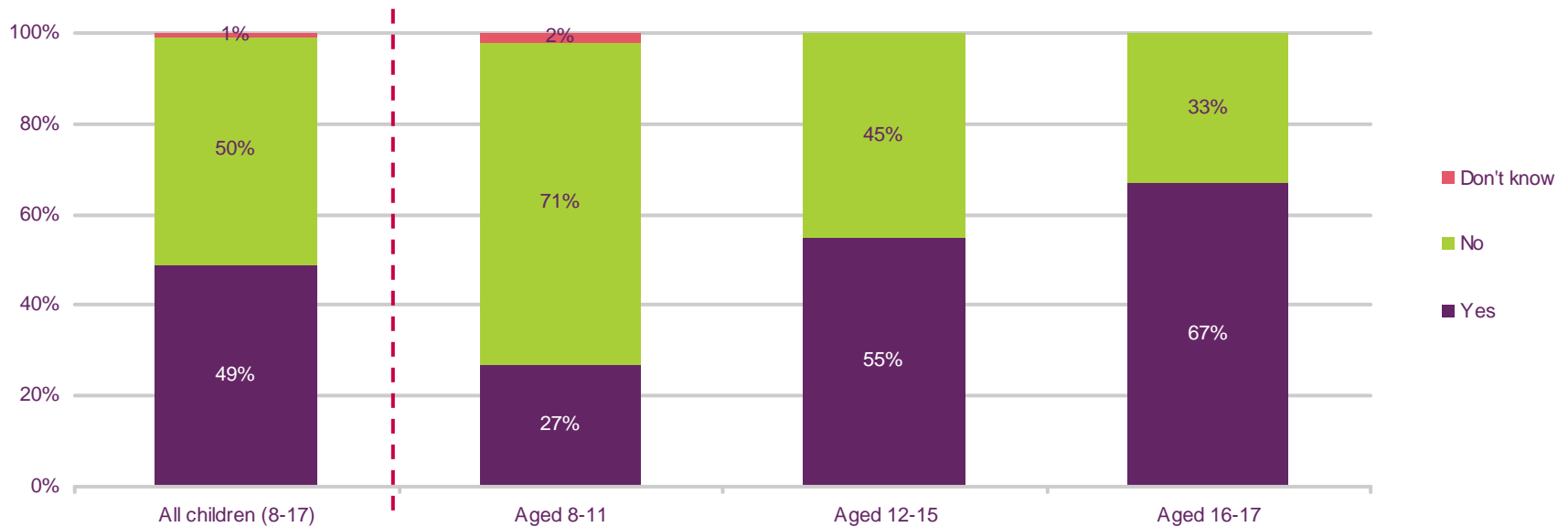
IN28A – I'd like to read out a number of things people might do using the types of technologies we've been talking about. For each one, could you please tell me if you've done it, or you'd be interested in doing it, or you're not interested in doing it?

Base: All who use the internet at home or elsewhere (1723)

Source: Ofcom research, fieldwork carried out by Saville Rossiter-Base in October to December 2007

One in four 8-11 year old internet users have a profile on a social networking site

Age of children who have a profile on social networking sites

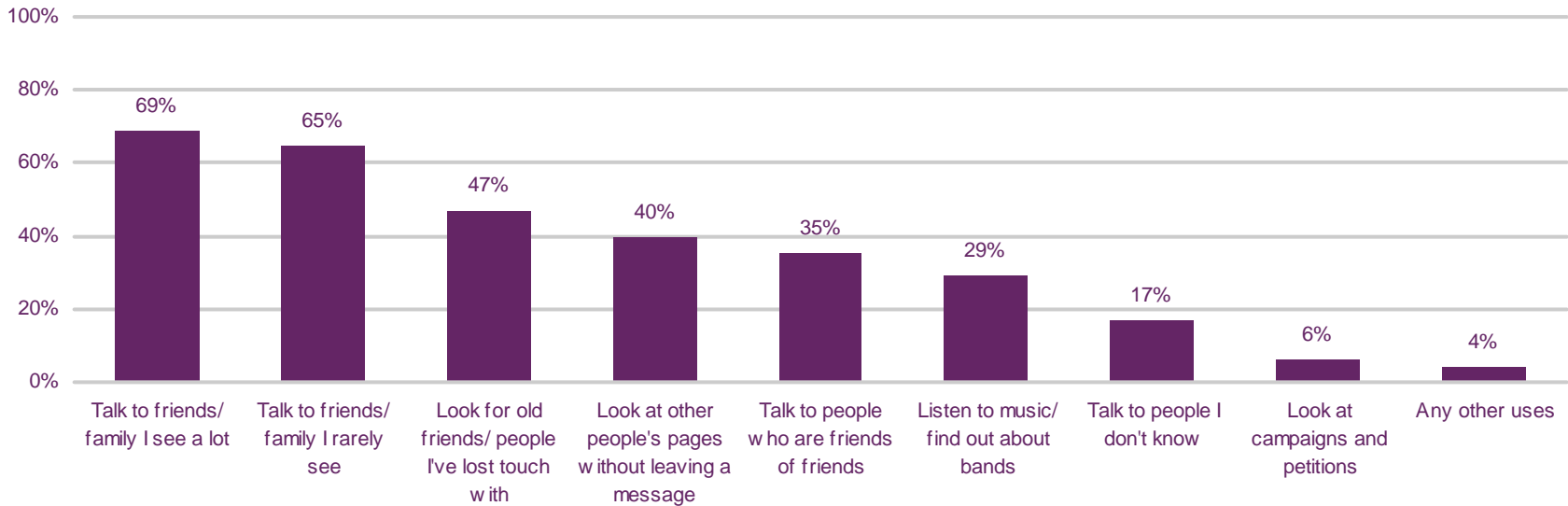


Base: All aware of social networking sites/whose child uses the internet: Parents (593), 8-11 (136), 12-15 (184), 16-17 (118)
 Source: Ofcom – Children, Young People and Online Content, October 2007

It is not possible to say which sites 8-11s are using; some will be on sites like Club Penguin, member communities and social networking sites

Adults mainly use social networking sites to communicate with people they know

Adults use of social networking sites



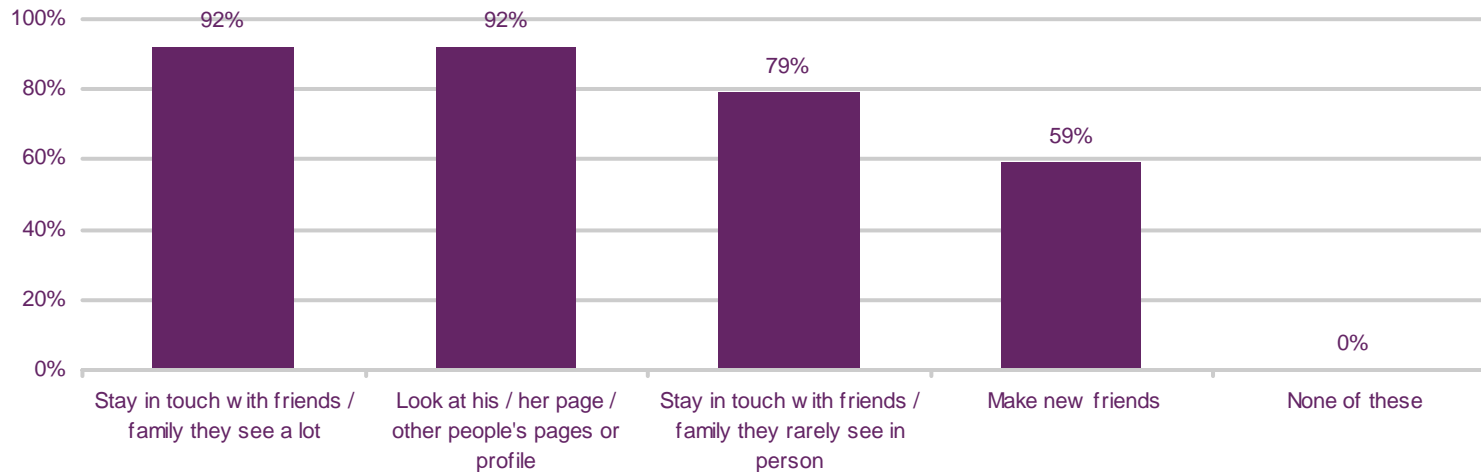
Base: All adults who have a current profile (347)

Source: Ofcom research, fieldwork carried out by Saville Rossiter-Base in October-December 2007

- But one in six adults use them to talk to people they don't know
- 16-24s are more likely to have talked to people they don't know (22%) than others

Most children use social networking sites to stay in touch and to look at profile pages

Children's use on social networking sites



Base: All who have a page/profile on social networking sites. Parents (95), children 8-17 (220)
Source: Ofcom – Children, Young People & Online Content, October 2007

How people are using social networking sites

- Users share personal information with a wide range of ‘friends’
- Communication with known contacts is the most popular social networking activity

It's a great way to socialise and to get known, I like being centre of attention and this is a wicked and fun way of doing it – Male 20

It is such a brilliant way to re-kindle old friendships which have fizzled out for no other reason but that you are busy and you live in different parts of the country – Female 25

How people are using social networking sites

17% of adults use their profile to communicate with people they don't know and this higher for younger adults (22%)

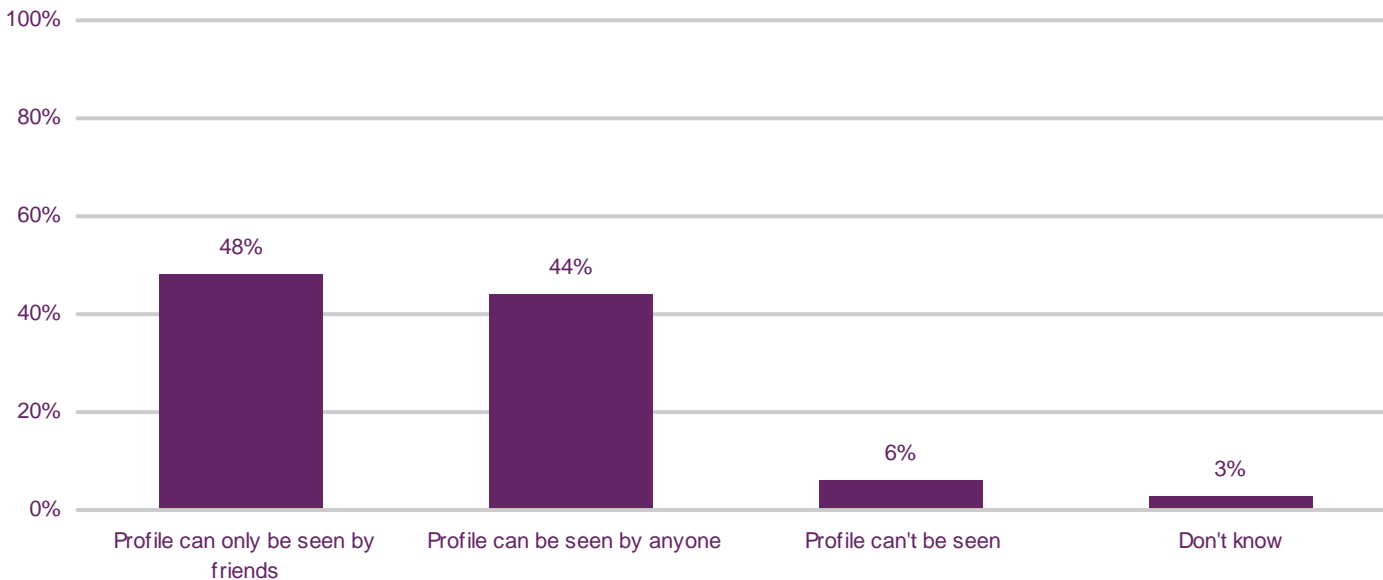
I moved to a new school and I am quite shy, but through Bebo I have made friends with loads of new people and it is so much easier to approach them when I have chatted with them online - Female 17

I'm a single mum and at home with the kids most of the time, it's a great way to meet new people – Female 32

I'd add anyone who is fit. [How would you find them?] Through friends, I'd look through friends and add them like that - Male 17

Most people say they are aware of their privacy settings

Awareness of who can see social networking profile - adults

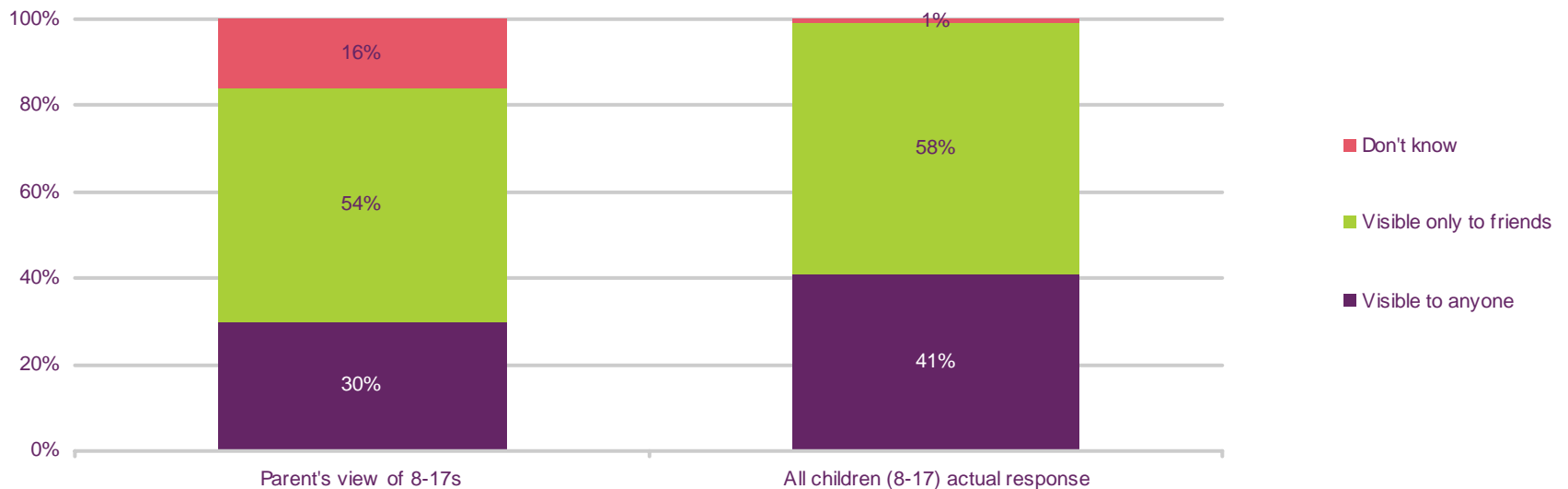


Base: All adults who have a current profile (347)

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Parents tend to underestimate whether their child's profile is visible to anyone

Awareness of who can see social networking profile – parents vs children



Q: Who is your child's/your profile visible to?

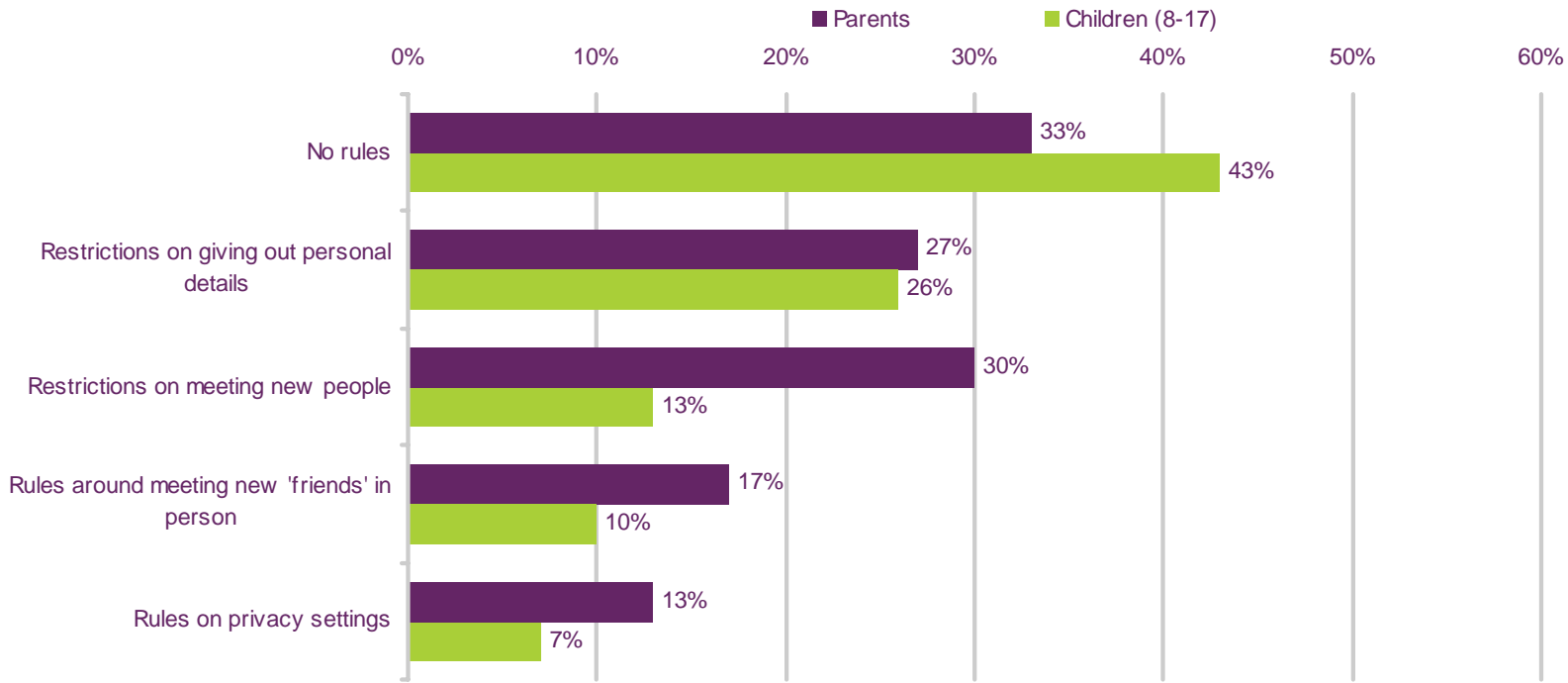
Base: All parents of 8-17s whose child has a visible profile (124); all boys aged 8-17 who have a visible profile (82); all girls aged 8-17 who have a visible profile (102).

Source: Ofcom – Children, Young People & Online Content, October 2007

*Caution – low base size.

Fewer children than adults reported there are rules around using social networking sites

Rules and restrictions on what children use social networking sites for – parents vs. children



Base: All parents whose child has a page/profile on a social networking site (178); All children (8-17) who have a page/profile on a social networking site (220)

Source: Ofcom – Children, Young People & Online Content, October 2007

Concerns about social networking are not top of mind

- The few users who commented on a negative aspect mentioned annoyance with self-promotion, parties organised online getting out of hand and online bullying
- Our research has highlighted the following areas of potentially risky behaviour
 - Leaving privacy settings as default ‘open’ combined with
 - Giving out sensitive personal information
 - Posting content (especially photos) that could be damaging to a person’s reputation
 - Contact with unknown people

People appear to be unconcerned about potential risks

- Lack of awareness of the privacy and safety issues

How can we come to any harm when we are sitting at home, nothing really bad can happen – Female 15

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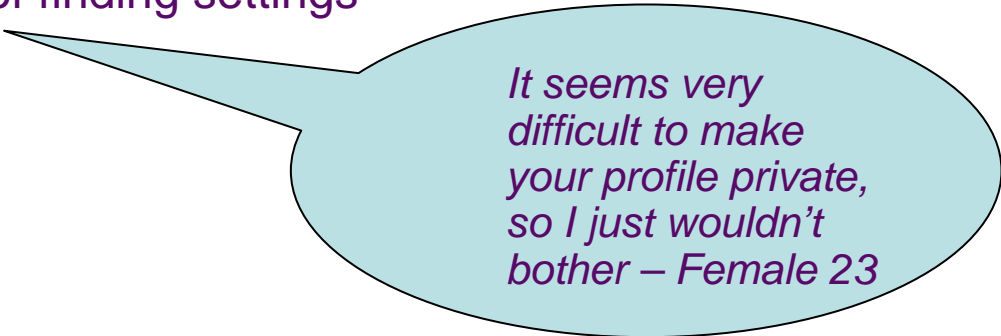
- Assumption that privacy and safety issues have been taken care of by the sites themselves

I would imagine they are watching what is going on and would not let certain types of material be posted – Male 37

- A feeling among younger users that they are ‘invincible’

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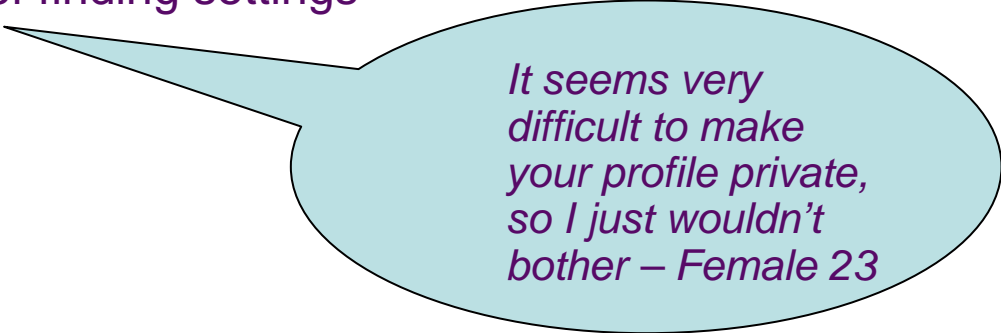
- Low levels of confidence in ability to manipulate privacy settings and difficulty of finding settings



It seems very difficult to make your profile private, so I just wouldn't bother – Female 23

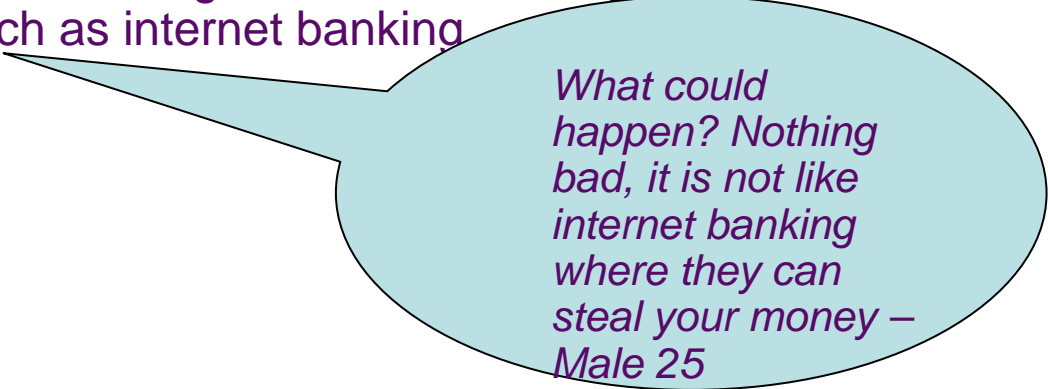
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- A Perception that social networking sites are less dangerous than other online activities, such as internet banking



What could happen? Nothing bad, it is not like internet banking where they can steal your money – Male 25

- Some social networkers have consciously evaluated the risks, making decision that they can be managed

But does risky behaviour lead to actual harm?

Livingstone and Millwood Hargrave (2007) note:

- ‘...some young people knowingly give away inappropriate (private) information publicly (allowing access to ‘anyone’)’
 - However, it seems likely that many more do so inadvertently, as a result of limitations both in internet literacy and in interface design.
- Research suggests that young people may be aware of the risks, especially regarding social networking sites, but this awareness of the issues and problems is not always translated into action.

But does risky behaviour lead to actual harm?

- However, the evidence base (for an increased likelihood of risk of media harm on the internet) is patchy and undeveloped ...
- For both practical and ethical reasons, some key questions remain difficult to research
- The evidence that does exist points to the increased potential for harm online.
- Therefore research can only guide policy by supporting a judgment based on the balance of probabilities rather than on irrefutable proof.'

Thank you