Do teachers understand their pupils' engagement with social media?

Dr Irene Bell,

Principal Lecturer,

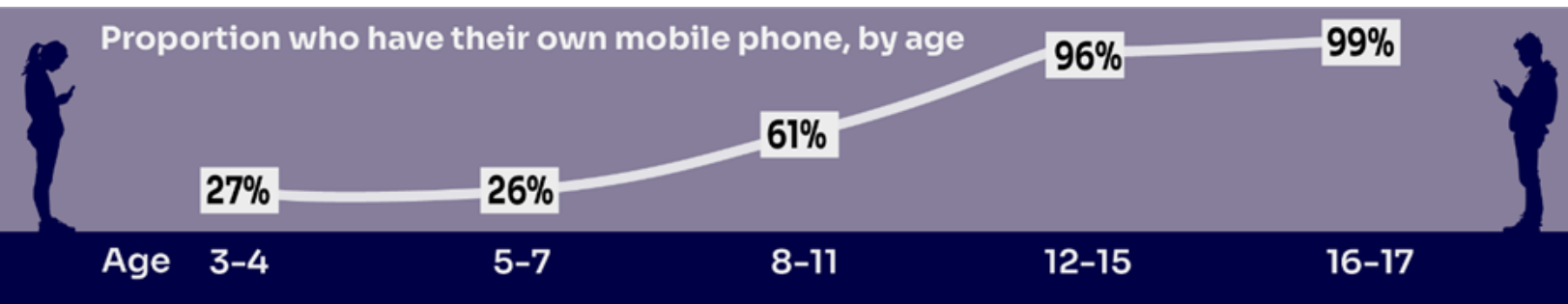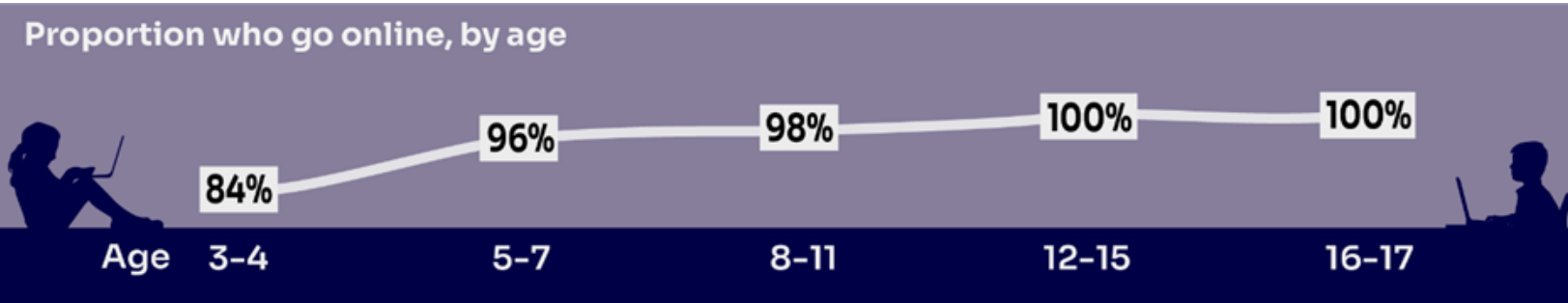Head of STEM, Stranmillis University College

Northern Ireland

Research Publications referred to during the presentation

- Alexander, J (2022) Influencing the Influential: An investigation into the impact of social media use on Key Stage Two children and how educators can support them in leading healthy digital lives. [M.Ed. Thesis 158 pupils, 39 parents, 7 teachers from 3 schools]

- Milligan, T., (2021) An investigation into primary schools' good E-Safety practice with emerging social media. [M.Ed. Thesis 70 teachers]

- Ofcom (April 2024) Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report.
Accessed https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2024

- Purdy, N., Ballentine, M., Lyle, H., Orr, K., Symington, E., Webster, D., and York, L., (2023) Growing up online:

  Children's online activities, harm and safety in Northern Ireland – an Evidence Report. [6481 children and young people] Accessed: https://www.stran.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Growing-Up-Online-Final-Report-WEB-VERSION.pdf

Ofcom stands for The Office of Communications (Ofcom) and is the UK communications regulator.
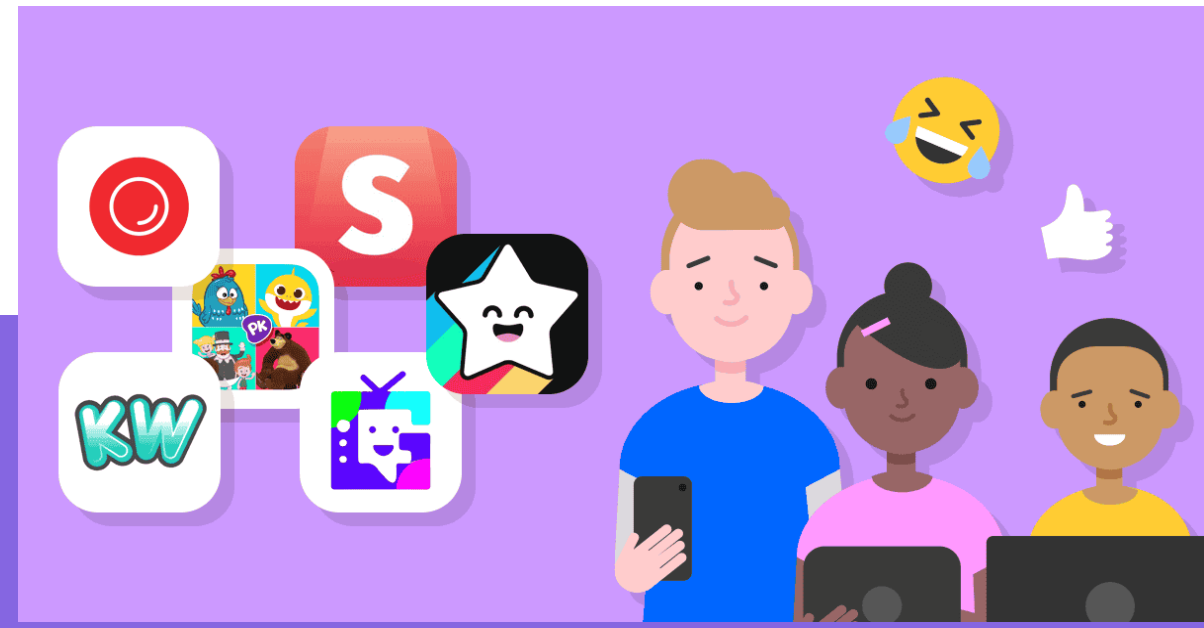
Social Media (SM) is part of young peoples' lives

Proportion who go online, by age

Age	3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17
	84%	96%	98%	100%	100%

Proportion who have their own mobile phone, by age

Age	3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17
	27%	26%	61%	96%	99%

Children's Commissioner (UK, 2018)	75%
Ofcom 2021	83%
Ofcom 2024	98%
Children in NI [Alexander (2022) age 11]	90%

Statistics taken from Ofcom 2024 Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report (pgs 9,10)

In the United Kingdom, the minimum age to use Social Media (SM) is 13 years.
Half of children aged 3 – 12 use at least one SM App.

Age	Percentage Using SM
3 – 7 years	34%
8 – 11 years	63%
12 – 17 years	92%
16 – 17 years	95%

Ofcom (2004)	Children aged 5 – 7 Years	
	2023	2024
Send messages or make video calls	59%	65%
Social media apps or sites	30%	38%
Watch live streaming apps	39%	50%
Online Gaming	34%	41%

Northern Ireland Children	**2023**	**2024**
WhatsApp	29%	37%
TikTok	25%	30%
Instagram	14%	22%
Discord	2%	4%

Results for Northern Ireland children aged 11 suggest that 95% of the boys and 85% of girls were on SM – 2nd most popular free time activity for girls and 5th for boys.

What are children doing online?
Alexander (2022)

Total screen time for one week	Daily average screen time	SM apps used throughout the week
40 hours 5 minutes	5 hours 14 minutes	TikTok: 20 hours 39 minutes Snapchat: 11 hours Facebook: 34 minutes Instagram: 30 minutes
50 hours	7 hours 24 minutes	TikTok: 6 hours Snapchat: 2 hours 50 minutes
23 hours	3 hours 27 minutes	TikTok: 8 hours 48 minutes
42 hours 7 minutes	6 hours 3 minutes	TikTok: 18 hours Snapchat: 46 minutes
17 hours 4 minutes	2 hours 26 minutes	TikTok: 11 hours 1 minute

How long were children aged 11 spending on Social Media? Alexander (2022:64)

Whilst most 14 – 18 year olds reported spending 2 – 4 hours per school day the following was also found:

➢ 34% of 14 – 18 year olds reported spending > 4 hours on a school day

➢ At weekends 64% of the children spent > 4 hours per day
➢ At weekends 22% reported spending > 7 hours online per day

➢ All reports discuss the impact that this volume of online engagement is having on the child's education and their mental health.

➢ 40% of 16 – 17 year old children believe their screen time is too high. [OfCOM]

Findings from Purdy, N., et al (Dec 2023:3) – Northern Ireland findings and Ofcom (2024) – UK findings

Data suggests social media use contributed to less sleep.

Pupils aged 10 and non-users, no child reported going to bed later than 21.00
Social media users varied from 20.00 to 23.30.

Pupils aged 11 and non-users, no child reported going to bed later than 21.00;
Social media users varied until after 23 .30

Latest bedtime for 11 year old non-users was 22.30 but this was earlier for age 11 social media users whose
 bedtime was extended to after 23.30.

69% of pupils aged 10 and 11 sleep with their social media device in their bedroom

93% of 11 year old social media users described it as *addictive*; this was the most popular of the
adjectives chosen by the respondents.

76% admitted that social media distracts them from getting things done. [Constantly on their mind]

Deprivation of sleep and education – Alexander (2022)

39%
Agree

44%
Disagree

"I find it hard to control my child's screen time"

Agreement by age of child

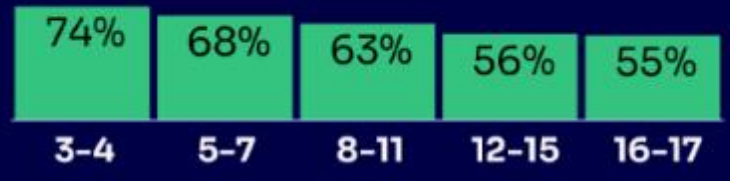| 3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17
34%	32%	37%	46%	49%

62%
Agree

22%
Disagree

"I think my child has a good balance between screen time and doing other things"

Agreement by age of child

3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17
74%	68%	63%	56%	55%

Ofcom 2024

% of online 12-17s who use websites or apps to help...

↑ Statistically higher than boys

Category	Boys	Girls
Relax	38	49 ↑
Improve my mood	31	38 ↑
Look up health symptoms	13	21 ↑
Sleep	14	18
Get support when feeling anxious	12	20 ↑
Healthy eating	13	18 ↑
Look after my mental health	11	19 ↑
Follow a fitness programme	14	13

Any listed

Boys 66

Girls 76 ↑

Statistics Ofcom 2024 (Infographice pg 22)
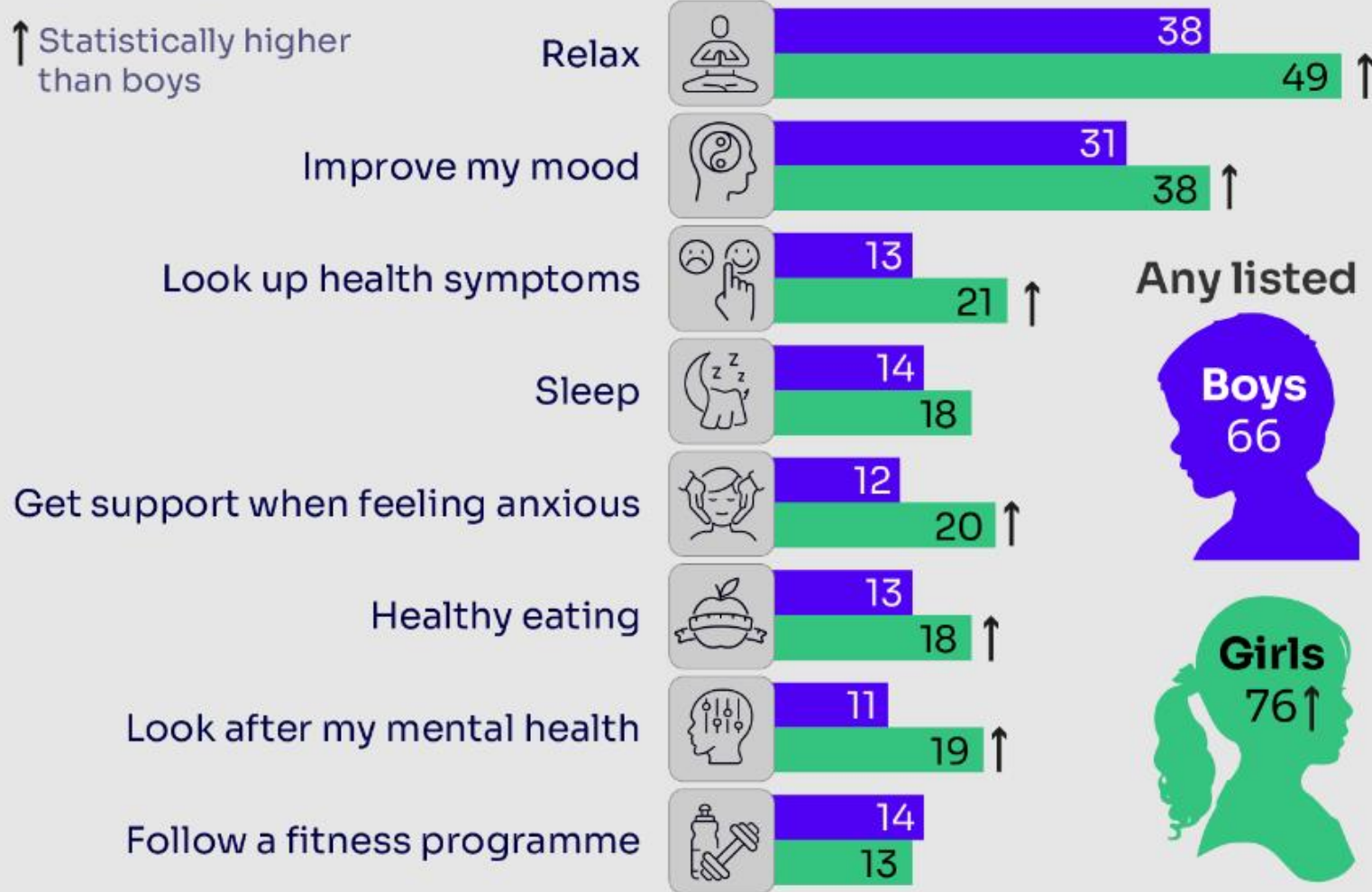
Parental concerns

Sharing personal information online
- **65%** Them giving out personal details to inappropriate people
- **62%** Companies collecting information about what they are doing online

Exposure to inappropriate content
- **75%** Seeing adult or sexual content
- **77%** Seeing any other type of inappropriate content

Experiencing harm or detriment
- **70%** Them being bullied online/cyberbullying
- **68%** Seeing content which encourages them to hurt or harm themselves
- **59%** The possibility of them being influenced by extreme views online
- **51%** The pressure on them to spend money online

Reputational damage
- **55%** Damaging their reputation either now or in the future

% Parents whose child age 3–17 goes online

Statistics Ofcom 2024 (Infograhic pg 29)

Exposure to bad language, inappropriate content, when their young minds are still impressionable.

The children's brains are still fairly malleable and they are being moulded in a way that is maybe not always positive.

"Clearly these children are influenced by people… and they're trying to copy them and follow them, which I think adversely affects those who are more child-like, those who are feeling 'I don't fit in'."

"They could encourage pupils… expose them to different career paths they may not have been aware of, or they could provide unrealistic ideals of becoming wealthy, perhaps negative models of work ethic etc."

"I don't think children are equipped emotionally to deal with that (inappropriate content)."

The majority of teachers felt that SM contributed to lower self-esteem. They also indicated that girls were more susceptible than boys. Photo-based SM platforms have a particularly negative impact on self-esteem.

Teacher perspective –Alexander (2022)

Children are more likely to be 'passive' than 'active' users of social media.

39% of all 8 – 17 year olds upload their own videos.

Comments from NI pupils include:

- 87% of NI pupils expressed the view that you 'don't notice the time passing while on SM'.

- 30% of pupils said SM made them feel good about themselves and how they look but 48% indicated that it made them feel worse.

- 85% indicated that getting 'likes' or positive comments made them feel good about themselves.

- All teachers believed that SM contributed to self –esteem levels, 'amplifying feelings they may have and putting pressure on them to 'keep up' with the images they see online.

Online behaviours – Ofcom vs Northern Irish Children

Are children as young as KS2 in Northern Ireland displaying and sharing photos?

- poor self-esteem – negative comments [37% of P7 pupils had experienced hurtful comments, social comparison]

- making social comparisons

- failing to get ample sleep – notifications disturbed sleep.

- displaying signs of depressed mood

Is there a correlation between these mental health issues and the pupils' level of engagement with social media and the nature of it?
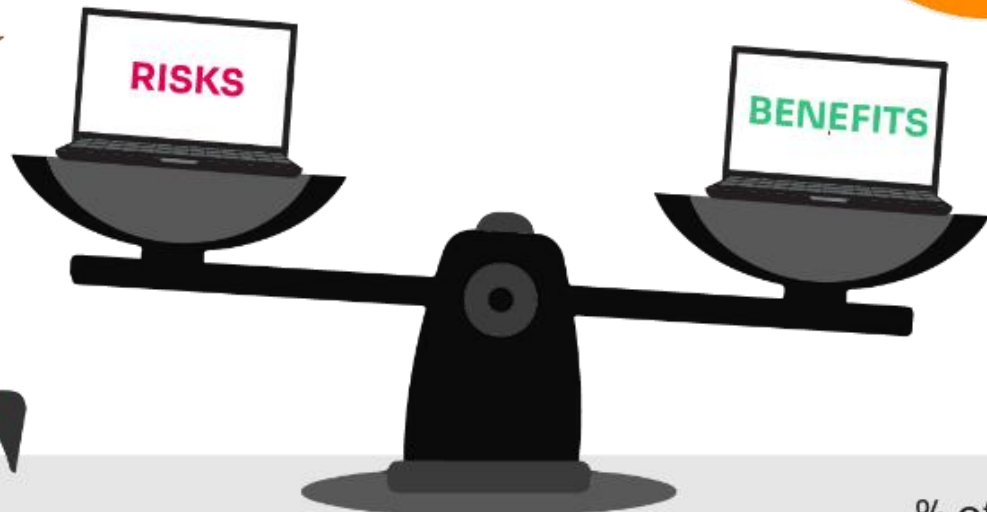
Negative or lack of comments on SM caused depressive symptoms.
Jong and Drummond (2016) and Frison et al. (2016)
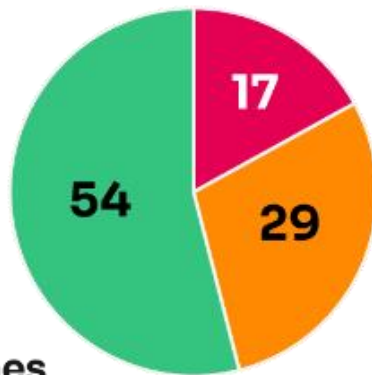

CHILD MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Signs they're Struggling Online
Nervous when using their phone
Secretive about activity
Socially withdrawn

How to Keep them Safe
Use privacy settings
Talk about their life online
Introduce basic boundaries

The impact of social media on self esteem
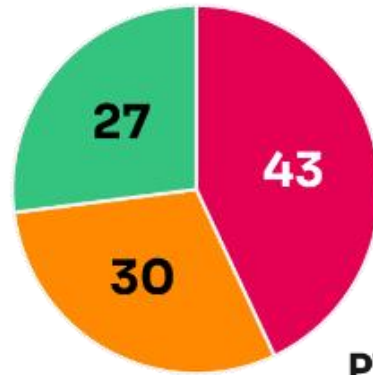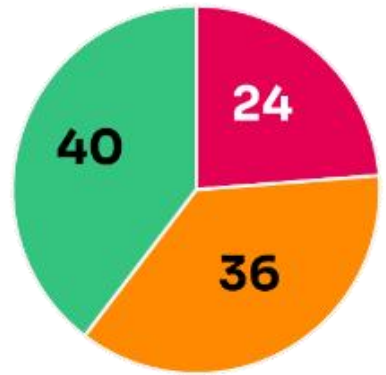
Ofcom (2024:28) Parents believe that the benefits of their children being online outweigh the risks

Focus group participants indicated that they

Posted photos because they '*look pretty*' or '*feel confident*' or '*can't bear to be seen without a filter*'. Pupils described their feelings on SM as 'a wee bit jealous', 'I'm not like that' or 'this makes me self-conscious'.

External research indicates that adolescence is where comparisons begins. 86% of the teachers supported this statement.

5% of 11 year old users used their device 'sometimes' or 'always' before sleeping but half prefer to filter or edit before posting, particularly girls. Kleemans and Daalmans (2016)

Pupils were very much influenced by 'influencers'. Webster, Dunne and Hunter (2020).
89% of the 11 year olds followed celebrities. Teachers felt that the pupils were emulating the influencers.

Teachers did comment that for some pupils it allowed them to see a life outside their circle.
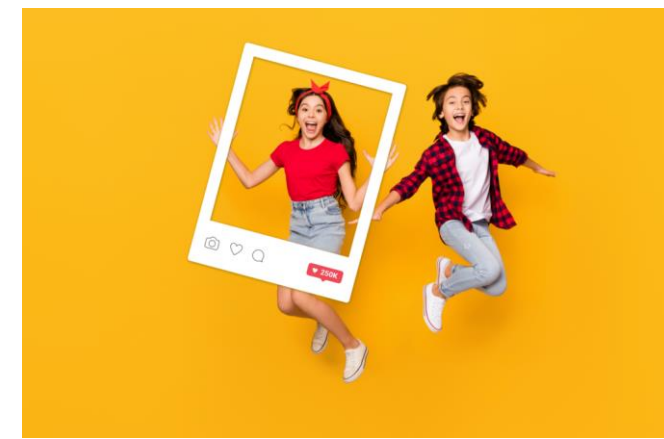
Making Social Comparisons (Alexander 2022)

The older a child becomes the more it comes to understand that that they are less secure in their ability to distinguish 'real' from 'fake' online. 75% (2022) has risen to 82% (2024)

Children aged 12 – 17 years – 69% confident of distinguishing between 'real' and 'fake'.
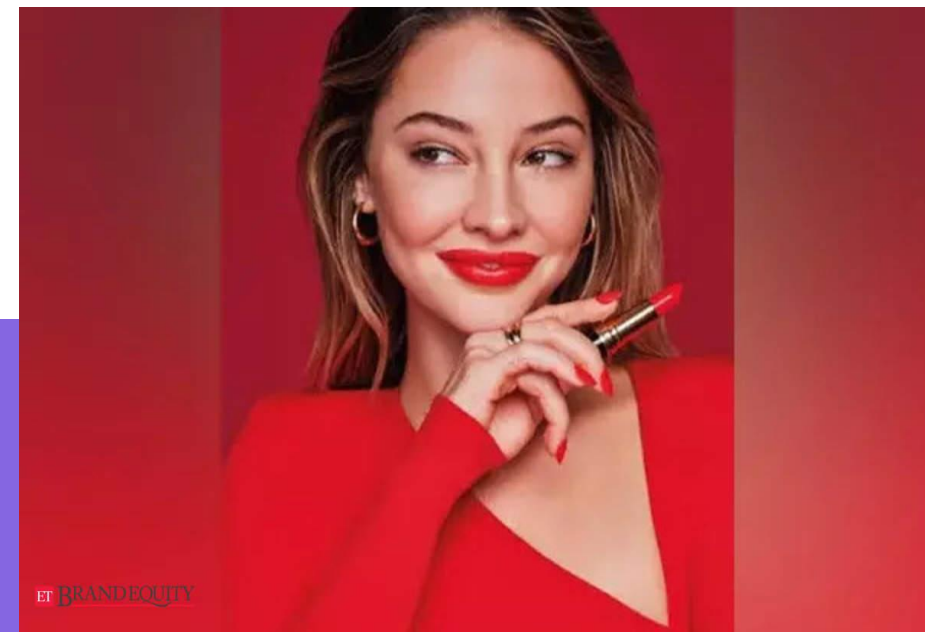
Boys are more likely to be confident in their ability to separate 'fake' from 'real'.

Children, particularly girls, are susceptible to influencer marketing.

27% thought Madelyn Cline shared the post because she thought the cosmetic product was good. [62% boys compared to 51% girls knew it was a paid promotion].

Pupil Evaluation of online content

OFCOM (2024)

Many children use gaming to connect with their peers.

54% of parents of 3 –17 year old pupils feel that being online helps their child develop creative skills

Increases in the proportion who play games online among 3-4s (23% vs 18%) and 5-7s (41% vs 34%) as well as among 16-17s (79% vs 72%).

More boys aged 3-17 game online than girls of the same age (71% vs 58%).

89% of 11-18 year olds reported gaming at least weekly on one or more gaming platforms

Range of games being played but in 2024 the greatest change was amongst 5 – 7 year olds with these children playing 'shooter' games rising from 10% to 15%.

Since 2022 there has been an increase in the percentage of children who play games online by themselves. There has been a decrease in the percentage playing online with a friend they know but an increase in the percentage gaming online with someone they don't know.

Online Gamimg Ofcom (2024)

Online Gaming: 8-17s

Playing games with others

74%
Played against or with someone else **they know**

32%
Played against or with someone **they don't know** outside game
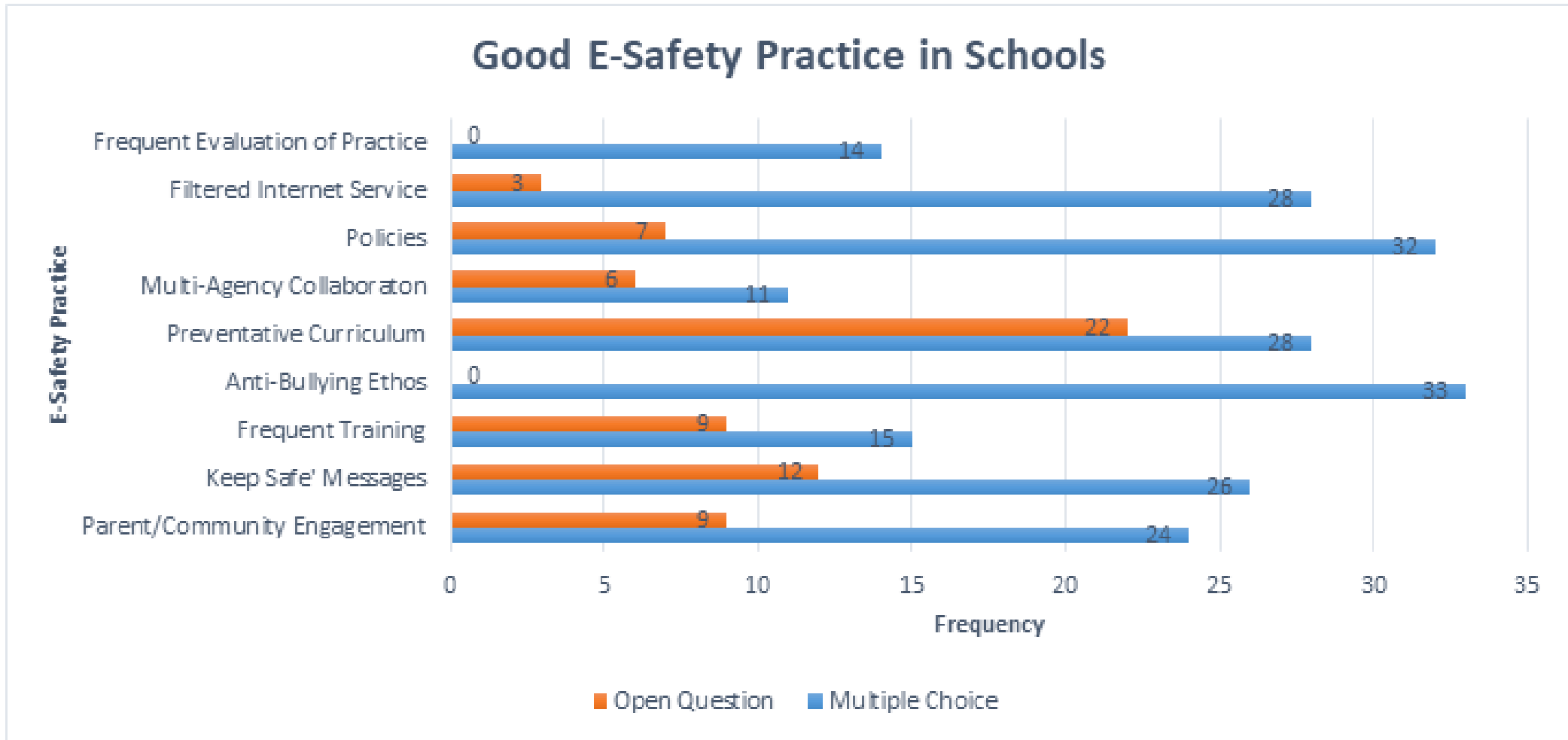
In-game chat (messaging or headset)

64%
Chat to people **they know**

31%
Chat to people **they don't know** outside the game

Good E-Safety Practice in Schools

Teacher responses to e-safety practice in their school Taylor (2022:50)

Is this the domain of pastoral care or ICT (Digital Literacy) Lead?

Managing Safeguarding Issues from Popular/Emerging Apps

Preventative Curriculum

Building skills and confidence

Child Protection Team and Senior Leadership Support

Encouraging Children and Bystanders to report

Policy Guidance

Parental Involvement

Newsletters & updates to parents

Teachers' views on how safeguarding issues from popular and emerging apps are managed. Taylor (2021:50)

Thinking critically and building resilience are considered the essential skills for social media use.

If children are to learn to think critically, logically and understand problem solving are these skills we should be teaching?

Is this an argument for computational thinking?

Computational Thinking is part of the Informatics Curriculum for all children 3 – 16 years in the UK.

Thank you!

Positive opportunities with Social Media

Frison, E. and Eggermont, S. (2017) Browsing, Posting, and Liking on Instagram: The Reciprocal Relationships Between Different Types of Instagram Use and Adolescents' Depressed Mood. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 20(10), pp. 603– 609.

Jong, S.T. and Drummond, M.J.N. (2016) Hurry up and 'like' me: immediate feedback on social networking sites and the impact on adolescent girls. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education* 7(3), pp. 251–267.

Kleemans, M., Daalmans, S., Carbaat, I. and Anschütz, D. (2016) Picture Perfect: The Direct Effect of Manipulated Instagram Photos on Body Image in Adolescent Girls. Media Psychology 21(1), pp. 93–110.

Webster, D., Dunne, L. and Hunter, R. (2020) Association Between Social Networks and Subjective Well-Being in Adolescents: A Systematic Review. *Youth & Society* 53(2), pp. 175–210.

Additional References