



Public consultation on Online Social Networking

Peter Davies

Safer Internet Forum, Luxembourg 25-26 September 2008



European Commission
Information Society and Media

Public consultation questions

- What risks are minors most likely to encounter on SNS? Are you aware of relevant research or statistics?
- What controls, if any, should be available to parents over their children's SNS accounts? Should parents be allowed to cancel accounts or change profiles of their children?
- Which tools are the most appropriate to protect minors when using SNSs? What further steps should SNS providers take to reduce the risks to minors on their sites?
- What should Member States do in order to improve the safe use of SNSs by minors?



High level of agreement on core principles

- Many potential threats, some very serious. Some more likely to happen than others.
- Parental involvement is important, but principles of privacy and trust should dictate how parents help children to stay safe.
- No technical tools are 100% effective. Education and awareness are the most important factors in enabling minors to keep themselves safe.
- Industry self-regulation is the preferred approach to meet public expectations on the safety of minors.
- Legislation should not prevent service providers from providing minors with all the benefits of social networking.



Actual versus potential harm

- Much is known about potential risks, but less about the harm actually experienced by minors online.
- Bad behaviour which young users inflict upon each other may be more likely than threats from adults.
- Problems associated with providing personal data also very common: identity theft, receipt of unsuitable marketing, locating minors offline.
- Meeting a contact offline is “the least common but arguably most dangerous risk”
- **Question:** Is the level of harmful or illegal activity that we know about just a function of the resources devoted to investigating it?



Parental controls

- Parental involvement in minors' online activity is crucial.
- Controls/limitations/cancellations all easy to circumvent.
- Intervention may involve questions of trust between parents and children.
- Intervention may be necessary in child's interests, but...
- **Question :** Can or should this be done without involvement or consent of the child?



Tools and strategies for protection

Technical tools

- Age-verification
- “Stop” buttons & reporting mechanisms
- Image filters & language algorithms

Questions

- What are the limitations on technical measures?
- What should we do to improve them?
- Industry standards? Mandatory minimum standards?



Tools and strategies for protection

Human moderation

- Pre-screening of content
- Moderation of chat rooms
- Controls on uploading of personal information

Questions :

- Should we address wide variations between service providers?
- Are different measures suitable for different age-ranges: Pre-teens, 13-16, 16-18?



Self-regulation & government action

- Industry self-regulation is the preferred approach to meet public expectations on the safety of minors.
- **Question:** How, if at all, is compliance with a self-regulatory regime to be monitored or enforced?
- Legislation should not prevent service providers from providing minors with all the benefits of social networking. However, safety measures vary greatly between providers.
- **Question:** Might mandatory minimum levels of provision be needed?
- Education and awareness are the most important factors in enabling minors to keep themselves safe.
- **Question:** Should media/IT education be compulsory in national curricula?

