

Better Internet for Kids

Age-appropriate design with youth

Best-practice guideline

March 2021



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Introduction

The internet and connected technologies offer unparalleled opportunities for children and young people to communicate, find information and be entertained, as well as acquire and develop digital skills. But many of the online services most used by youth were not designed with them as the primary user base or audience.

As of October 2020, there are 4.66 billion active internet users and 4.14 billion active social media users globally¹ and 90 per cent of households in the EU-27 have internet access of some kind.² At the global level it is estimated that one in three internet users is a child under the age of 18.³ From a survey of children aged 9 to 16 who use the internet, average daily use amounted to 167 minutes per day and average of 80 per cent of children use a smartphone or mobile phone daily.⁴

Digital technologies and the internet clearly play a significant role in the lives of most children and young people in the EU. These youth span two generations: Generation Z (born in 1995/96 to 2010) and Generation Alpha (born since 2010). Both these generations differ notably from their predecessors with regards to leadership and learning styles, favouring collaboration and cocreation when working with others. These generations display a preference for multi-modal and virtual learning environments, respectively.⁵







CATEGORY	BUILDERS	BABY BOOMERS	GENERATION X	GENERATION Y	GENERATION Z	GEN ALPHA
Leadership style L - Leader l - New leaders	 Controlling	 Directing	 Coordinating	 Guiding	 Empowering	 Inspiring
Ideal leader	Commander	Thinker	Doer	Supporter	Collaborator	Co-creator
Learning style	Formal	Structured	Participative	Interactive	Multi-modal	Virtual

Figure 1. The evolution of leadership and learner styles across generations. © McCrindle (2019)

Both generations have grown up with technology and the internet as fundamental features of their lives – in the case of Generation Alpha, all children born after 2010 have been surrounded by connected technology, digital services and a variety of screens from the day they were born. As a result, these children and young people are core users of technology; they were born into this connected world and know nothing else. While it may be tempting to label these generations as 'digital natives'⁶, it is important to recognise that being born into a digital world does not grant young people innate abilities in using and understanding technology. Aptitude for technology can be affected by breadth of use, experience, self-efficacy and education.⁷ So, a consideration of how best to shape and design digital

¹ <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2020/10/social-media-users-pass-the-4-billion-mark-as-global-adoption-soars>

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/377585/household-internet-access-in-eu28/>

³ https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/idp_2016_01.pdf

⁴ <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/eu-kids-online/reports/EU-Kids-Online-2020-March2020.pdf>

⁵ <https://2qean3b1jld1s87812ool5ji-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/infographics/Generation-Alpha-Infographic-2020.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/10748120110424816/full/html>

⁷ <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/27739/>

products and services to meet the needs of these users is always preferable to relying on the fallacy that all young people can use and navigate digital products and services proficiently and safely.

It is estimated that by 2030, 45 per cent of the workforce will comprise these two generations⁸ – people who have grown up in a largely digital world and used the internet for most (if not all) of their lives, and the generations to follow will be no different. Increasingly, the majority of a product/service's user base will consist of these two generations. Therefore, it is inherently in the best interests of technology companies and the internet industry to consider (and act upon) the wants and needs – as well as the unique perspective – that these two generations can bring to digital product and service development and evolution. Safety of youth using technology and digital products/services is a primary consideration but, as you will see through the work of the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Youth Panel highlighted later in this report, young people have strong views about other issues that affect their digital lives and well-being.

"We adults are responsible for building an age-appropriate digital environment which offers young people tools from fun to education and from social interaction to creative expression. To reach that goal, we must open our ears first and listen to young people and children. They are the ones who hold the answer to the key questions: 'What do I need? What really matters to me?'"

June Lowery-Kingston, Head of Unit for Accessibility, Multilingualism and Safer Internet, DG CONNECT, European Commission

This report will explore ways to meaningfully engage with and involve young people in co-design processes and the rationale for adopting this approach. It will also highlight existing projects, initiatives and best-practice examples that are leading the way in shaping digital products and services to be more age-appropriate for youth, as well as paving the way for future products and services that consider and integrate age-appropriate design from their inception.

⁸ <https://mccrindle.com.au/wp-content/uploads/images/GenZGenAlpha.pdf>

The methodology of meaningful youth participation

Including children and young people in matters that affect them, giving them meaningful involvement and a voice should never be considered as optional; they are fundamental rights:

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12)⁹
 - Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.
- EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 24)¹⁰
 - Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.
 - In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration.

"Youth participation should not be a choice, but a must. Today's decision makers, some of whom have grown up without a hint of digitisation, are shaping the future of today's youth without listening to their ideas, wishes and plans. The future is being led by people who do not understand and live our new worldview. Only the right mix of generations can shape the future as we all imagine it to be."

Liliane, BIK Youth Ambassador, Austria

The Lundy Model of Participation (2007)¹¹ developed by Laura Lundy, Professor of international children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast, provides a way to conceptualise these rights to participation. It is intended to focus decision makers on four distinct factors while also recognising the relationship between these factors and their chronological order.

⁹ https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UNCRC_summary-1_1.pdf

¹⁰ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/24-rights-child>

¹¹ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30032800>



Figure 2. The Lundy Model of Participation as included in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020
(Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015)

In chronological order, these factors are:

- **Space:** A prerequisite for the meaningful engagement of children and young people in decision making is the creation of an opportunity for involvement – a safe and inclusive space in which children are encouraged to express their views.
- **Voice:** Children must be facilitated to express their views – for this, they will need access to child-friendly documentation and information, possibly in combination with some capacity building.
- **Audience:** The view must be listened to – the children have a right of audience, in the sense of a guaranteed opportunity to communicate their views to an identifiable individual or body with a responsibility to listen.
- **Influence:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate – it is easy for adults to comply with the various outward signs of consultation and ultimately ignore children's views; the challenge is to find ways of ensuring that adults not only listen to children but that they take children's views seriously. Children and young people should be told what decision was made, how their views were regarded, and the reasons why action has proceeded in a certain way.

"Children's participation is an entitlement, not the gift of adults. When decisions are made about keeping children safe from harm online or elsewhere, their views must be sought and taken seriously. Spaces should be actively created where they can express themselves safely in ways that they choose. I welcome this good practice guide which is an important step in implementing this for all children in the digital environment."

**Laura Lundy, Co-Director of the Centre for Children's Rights
and a Professor in the School of Social Sciences, Education
and Social Work at Queen's University, Belfast**

For Safer Internet Day (SID) 2020, a high-level European Commission event was held in Brussels to launch the *Youth Pledge for a Better Internet* initiative, focusing on how to make online platforms and services more age appropriate for children and young people. The BIK Youth Ambassadors involved in the initiative identified data privacy and protection as a key focus. As part of this initiative, they encouraged industry members from the Alliance to better protect minors online to work with young people through the [#Pledge2Youth](#) challenge to improve current data privacy policies and practices and consider age-appropriate design.

The case studies included throughout this report highlight the results of those collaborations and serve as examples of best practice for industry on how to meaningfully involve young people in co-design processes. Each case study also identifies how the decisions taken reflect the four key elements of Lundy's model. Further information about the work of the BIK Youth Ambassadors and the BIK Youth Pledge 2020 work programme are provided in the [BIK Youth Participation 2020 section of this document](#).

Case study: Sulake

Sulake is a social entertainment company focused on providing a safe and fun online space for self-expression through its products, Habbo (ages 13+) and Hotel Hideaway (ages 17+). These spaces allow young people to socialise using customised avatars and to chat, play games and customise their space.

As part of the #Pledge2Youth challenge, Sulake wanted to empower users to make informed decisions when playing by increasing the transparency and visibility of their Terms and Conditions (T&Cs). Topics in the T&Cs that affect the experience of young people include the community rules, ownership of user-generated content, and users' rights regarding data processing.

In order to engage with their users on this issue, Sulake worked with a range of young people to host co-design sessions with ten users aged 14-23 years old within their Habbo product. By running the sessions in this way, they provided space (a familiar and safe environment known to the young people), voice (tools in-game were used to allow young people to freely express their views) and audience (the sessions were hosted and run by Sulake staff). In these sessions, users were asked to give their views on the T&Cs. Feedback from many highlighted the T&Cs to be 'too repetitive', 'too long', 'too complex', 'boring', 'not engaging' and that they didn't match the games' look and feel.

Users were also asked how to improve the readability and visibility of T&Cs. Suggestions included creating a shorter version of the T&Cs (using images, bullet points and simpler text), creating a short explainer video that focused on the most important terms, building a game/tutorial into Habbo and Hotel Hideaway to help users learn the T&Cs, rewarding users with in-game items for engaging with the T&Cs through a game, and training a small group of users to become T&Cs Ambassadors within the communities. Sulake is actively considering these suggestions.

"As well as being funny and creative, the direct, inclusive, team-based approach of the young people I worked with was extremely refreshing. The experience has given my team and I real insight into how our products can better serve the needs of our players."

Raquel Alvarez, Customer Experience & User Safety Director, Sulake

Age-appropriate design and youth participation with industry – projects and initiatives

Lundy's Model of Participation provides a robust framework for empowering children and young people to have space to express their voices, a voice that is heard, the right audience and for those views to have influence. However, this can only be achieved if decision makers recognise, understand and facilitate these four key elements.

This section highlights useful general guidance, age-appropriate design initiatives and youth participation programmes related to the internet, before moving on to specific best-practice examples of youth participation with industry to co-design age-appropriate online tools and features.

From a general perspective, the European Commission's '*Embedding a children's rights perspective in policy and decision-making*' (2019)¹² provides a useful overview of key documents at EU and international level that protect and promote children's rights, alongside national institutions that promote children's rights across the member states. Another useful resource is that of the '*The 7 Golden Rules for Participation*'¹³ by Children and Young People' Commissioner Scotland, that set out seven participation principles for use with children and young people. The resource is also available in Widgit symbol format as a communication tool for children and young people who are non-verbal, have speech and language difficulties, or additional support needs.

From an age-appropriate design perspective, mention should also be given to the UK Information Commissioner's Office which published an 'age-appropriate design' code of practice that was passed into UK law through the UK's Data Protection Act (2018) in June 2020.¹⁴ The code was developed following a thorough consultation with parents, children, schools, children's campaign groups, developers, tech companies and online service providers. It sets 15 flexible standards for online services and tech companies to adhere to when providing or creating products and services used by children or specifically aimed at children in order to provide them with a safe space to learn, explore and play. It requires services to put the best interests of the child first and outlines how the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies in the context of children using digital services.

Standards include:

- High privacy settings by default.
- Minimisation of collection of children's data.

¹² <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/300ceef2-b98a-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹³ <https://cypcs.org.uk/get-help/i-work-with-younger-people/golden-rules/>

¹⁴ <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/key-data-protection-themes/age-appropriate-design-a-code-of-practice-for-online-services/>

- Geolocation and profiling tools to be 'off' by default.
- Providing privacy information in clear language suitable for children.
- Refraining from using nudge techniques that encourage a child to provide unnecessary personal data or weaken their privacy.
- Including tools to ensure connected toys and devices adhere to the code.
- Providing accessible tools to help children exercise their data protection rights and to report concerns.

From a governance perspective, the Internet Society's '*IGF Youth Ambassadors Programme*'¹⁵ provides young people and young adults worldwide with the opportunity to partner with organisations, participate in public policy debates around internet governance (such as representation at the annual Internet Governance Forum (IGF)), and develop leadership skills. The programme builds on the work of previous initiatives such as the Youth@IGF programme, Childnet YouthIGF programme, and the work of the Youth Coalition on Internet Governance.

¹⁵ <https://www.internetsociety.org/policy-programs/igf-youth-ambassadors/>

Case study: SUPER RTL

SUPER RTL is the most popular moving image provider in Germany among children. It provides TV formats, online portals and leisure activities to children of pre-school and children aged 6-13 through its Toggolino and TOGGO brands respectively.

A new service, TOGGO Radio, was launched in 2020 and offers music, entertainment and news to children aged 6-11 years old. It also allows listeners to request songs, request an on-air greeting to family and friends, and participate in challenges or competitions. As part of the #Pledge2Youth challenge, SUPER RTL wished to investigate what children know about personal data collection and protection, how the form children use to contact TOGGO Radio could be improved to help them understand and make informed decisions around collection of their personal data, and the level (if any) of parental involvement around TOGGO Radio.

As an experienced broadcaster, SUPER RTL has long used UX (User Experience) Labs to directly work with and seek the views of children regarding various aspects of the services SUPER RTL provides. Its UX Lab created space by interviewing children aged 6-11 about the consent form and the terms it used. They provided a neutral space for children to share their views, thus enabling voice. They found that children often only read the headline of the form rather than the instructional text. Children were familiar with terms such as 'privacy policy' and 'conditions of participation'; but they lack understanding of these terms. When ticking the checkboxes on the form to give consent, children would often involve parents/carers in the decision.

As a next step, SUPER RTL plans to run a playful and engaging workshop with children to explore redesigning the form so that children can more easily consent themselves. The output of this workshop would be used to inform various expert departments (audience) to redesign and implement the form. Finally, further feedback will be sought from children and parents during and after implementation in order to ensure the form meets their needs (influence). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SUPER RTL has had to consider alternative ways to run its UX Labs workshops, as these have traditionally been face-to-face.

"There are long-term benefits of working with young people and it has been so valuable for SUPER RTL – knowing what children want, need and do has helped us as a company, especially in the shift from TV to digital provider."

Boris Bolz, Chief Platforms & Marketing Officer, SUPER RTL

Case study: Facebook

The Facebook family of apps includes Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger and Messenger Kids. Across this network there were over 3 billion users in Q3 2020. These products have age restrictions in place in order to comply with GDPR and data protection laws in other regions. The minimum age for all services (excluding Messenger Kids) is 13, with users in the European region required to be 16 to use WhatsApp. Under GDPR, in some EU countries, some features are unavailable to users aged 13-15 unless parental consent is provided.

With increasing attention given to age-appropriate design, Facebook wanted to ensure that young people are protected and that their rights are upheld – such as rights to privacy, association, play, access to information, right of education and freedom of expression. Involving young people in decisions that Facebook makes to its products is an important way to ensure those rights are recognised and respected.

Facebook initiated TTC Labs (Trust, Transparency and Control Labs) to create a forum for policy makers, regulators, civil society, tech industry, academia and youth ambassadors (enabling the right audience) to discuss and co-create solutions that balance trust, transparency, control, safety, play, autonomy and user experience. With regards to data privacy and youth, they focused on three thematic areas: transparency and control for young people (ways to make data policies and privacy controls transparent and easy to understand for all ages), age-appropriate safeguards (privacy by default, minimising personal data usage and providing an age appropriate experience) and age verification (considering solutions to protect children's privacy and safety while not creating barriers to young people accessing Facebook services because they are unable to prove their age).

TTC Labs is a continuing multi-year workstream that has held a number of day-long Design Jams in London, Sydney and Washington DC (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) and virtual global roundtables in 2020, including a European roundtable attended by BIK Youth Ambassadors (creating space). These collaborations with youth and other stakeholders has led to the publishing of the *TTC Labs Youth Design Guide: How to Design with Trust, Transparency & Control for Young People* as well as a *Design Jam Toolkit* and other co-creation resources (demonstrating influence) made freely available for other companies, organisations and start-ups to utilise at www.ttclabs.net. A Youth Ambassador programme includes young people from New Zealand, Australia and Ireland, and a research feedback programme involves youth from the EU and North America (enabling voice). Facebook has also expressed interest in further work with children under the age of 13, in order to understand how younger children may wish to use and access the Facebook family of apps.

Facebook is keen to develop a more systematic and structured way of engaging and working with young people to ensure greater representation of youth from EU countries and other regions, and space for diverse voices to influence ongoing thought. They have also committed to keeping BIK Youth Ambassadors informed of further decisions that are made.

"Trust, Transparency and Control Labs (TTC Labs) was created and funded by Facebook and is a cross-industry initiative that creates innovative design solutions that places young people at its heart and in control of their privacy. As part of our commitment to the BIK Youth Pledge, our youth-focused Design Jams, in collaboration with 50 organisations, led to the publication of the draft Youth Design Guide in June 2020 and will inform our second edition, which we look forward to publishing in the coming months in 2021."

Dave Miles, Head of Safety for Europe, Middle East and Africa, Facebook

"The roundtable offered an open dialogue where I felt comfortable to discuss concerns pertaining to digital safeguarding and literacy; it was an invaluable insight to listen to experts and understand the process of decision making in policies that directly impact the youth."

Hadia, BIK Youth Ambassador, UK

Case study: Twitter

As an established social media platform, Twitter's policies have historically been developed with its Trust and Safety Council and experts but, in 2018, they asked for public feedback on a policy on hateful content before launching it on the platform. Twitter have also expressed a keen interest in hearing from young people on how Twitter could do better.

Twitter has highlighted media and information literacy as a key challenge on the platform, especially for young people. Twitter wants people to use its service and the wider internet in a healthy and positive way.

Twitter have been working with BIK Youth Ambassadors on a media literacy campaign to be rolled out on the platform at a later date. They also ran webinars with the BIK Youth Ambassadors on best practices on the safety and security of young people. The BIK Youth Ambassadors were presented with different scenarios involving online content and were asked how they would approach such situations online, and what the best course of action would be to resolve the issue. Topics included filter bubbles and algorithms, disinformation and the positive use of social media.

Twitter have committed to ongoing engagement with BIK Youth Ambassadors through monthly discussions based on topics identified by the young people.

BIK Youth Participation 2020

#Pledge2Youth challenge

During 2020, BIK Youth Ambassadors were involved in the #Pledge2Youth campaign working alongside industry members of the Alliance to better protect minors online to consider and run a design challenge, focusing on an aspect of age-appropriate design or data privacy, exploring innovative ways to give children and young people a space to express their views and ensure their voice is listened to and acted upon. The protocols for the challenge were derived from Lundy's Model of Participation and guidance from the TTC Labs Design Jam Toolkit.¹⁶ This enabled a decentralised but coordinated programme of work where industry members were free to shape the co-design consultations as they deemed appropriate while complying with the protocols.

Six Alliance industry members took part in the #Pledge2Youth challenge: Facebook/TTC Labs, the LEGO Group, Samsung, Sulake, SUPER RTL and Twitter.

The table below briefly outlines the focus, aims and methodology of the six challenges. A number of challenges are explained in more detail through the case studies included throughout this report.

Alliance industry member	Focus	Aims	Methodology
Facebook/TTC Labs	Transparency and control, age-appropriate safeguards, age verification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make data policies and privacy controls easier to understand. Strengthen privacy for young people. Consider fair and balanced age verification systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TTC Labs Design Jam one-day events. Virtual global roundtables. Creation of Facebook Youth Ambassador programme.
The LEGO Group	Communication of data protection/privacy protection policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify best ways to communicate privacy policy and procedure to young people. Empower users to make good decisions that limit privacy violations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-home qualitative research with parents/carers and children. Comprehension and co-creation sessions. Adopting a child-centric approach.
Samsung	Privacy settings on Samsung devices, awareness of online safety risks and well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help parents and young people understand privacy settings on Samsung devices. Raise awareness around online safety issues such as fake news, online behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offline (prior to COVID-19 pandemic) and online workshops. Three phases – Discover, Ideate, Prototype. Use of local education

¹⁶ <https://toolkit.ttlabs.net/plan/transparency>

		and digital well-being.	partners in four target countries to provide access to children and young people.
Sulake	Users' understanding and visibility of terms and conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower users to make informed decisions by increasing the transparency and visibility of terms and conditions. • Consider ways to simplify terms and conditions, and make them more engaging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-creation sessions run within the Habbo game environment. • Sessions run by Sulake staff.
SUPER RTL	Users' understanding of data collection, giving consent, parental involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover what children understand about data collection and protection. • Explore ways to redesign the TOGGO Radio consent form to aid understanding and accessibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of SUPER RTL's UX Labs. • Frequent feedback sought at all stages of the design process.
Twitter	Media literacy, digital empathy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and run media literacy and digital empathy campaign. • Empower young people to develop critical thinking skills and resilience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter training session with BIK Youth Ambassadors. • Media literacy/digital empathy awareness session with young people. • Monthly online discussion sessions with BIK Youth Ambassadors. • #TwitterForGood campaign.

Case study: Samsung

Samsung produce a range of home appliances and mobile telecommunication products such as smartphones and tablets. These mobile telecommunication products are used daily by young people around the world. Samsung also holds the largest market share in the global smartphone industry.

As part of the #Pledge2Youth challenge, Samsung focused on raising awareness in parents/carers and young people of different online safety issues and ways to help those audiences understand the privacy settings (and safety features) available on Samsung mobile devices.

Samsung recognise that, although all their users are using the same technology (a Samsung device), different users have different needs. Younger users could be exposed to harmful online content and behaviour through the use of Samsung products. Samsung's approach to online safety is through three key approaches:

- Prepare people with the digital skills needed to be confident users of technology through handbooks, curricula and tips and tricks, for youth, parents and educators.
- Provide the knowledge and tools needed to use technology thoughtfully in stewardship of a sustainable lifestyle and safety.
- Protect from harmful content or behaviour, through the use of educational tools and tech solutions.

To explore these issues, Samsung ran a pilot programme in Poland consisting of two phases: offline workshops in schools to detect problems and youth users' needs, and online workshops to discuss and find solutions to these problems. The pilot involved 36 students aged 12-14 and the formats provided space and voice to young people. The offline workshops gave young people the challenge of 'raising awareness about digital well-being'.

Three key themes emerged from the school-based workshops – online contact with strangers who conceal their identity, online hateful behaviour, and control of time spent online. From the online workshops, possible solutions to these themes included comms activities on social media and in schools to raise awareness, sharing tips for young people and tips for adults, and encouraging dialogue between adults and youth to ensure these issues are discussed. These outputs demonstrated voice and influence; ideas that the young people considered could be put into practice in their local community (school) so that they could see the impact of those initiatives. The output of these sessions was also shared with BIK Youth Ambassadors to gain further feedback from them.

Samsung has plans to replicate this youth participation process in other countries and are keen to see if and how needs of young people and parents/carers differ from country to country. Ultimately, Samsung seek to achieve a good overview of needs across Europe so that they can adjust their awareness raising campaigns accordingly and consider the design of new tools to benefit all users.

“Working with young people gave us precious insights on how they perceive the involvement of parents and carers in their digital lives. They don't want to be controlled but rather establish an open dialogue with adults and receive support when they are facing issues.”

Francesca Falco, CSR Regional Manager, Samsung

Key outcomes

The collaboration between industry members of the Alliance to better protect minors online and BIK Youth Ambassadors resulted in a range of different consultation styles. Due to the restrictions imposed in many countries as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many consultation sessions and workshops ended up taking place online. Some industry members used their own platforms/services and established user base to consult with (such as Sulake's Habbo and SUPER RTL's UX Labs), whereas others used videoconferencing platforms to connect with young people to provide a safe and engaging **space** needed for youth participation. The LEGO Group pledged to take a child-centric approach to their work around data privacy communication.

Many members also opted to run training or provide further information and details to young people (such as Twitter's safety training and Samsung's exploratory workshops) to assist them in forming their views and opinions, thus further enabling their **voice**.

With regards to **audience**, most consultations and workshops were run by staff from the Alliance industry member companies, thus providing someone with power to make decisions to directly hear the views and suggestions of young people. In terms of audience breadth, Facebook/TTC Lab's Design Jams and global roundtables provided the greatest scope for young people's views and opinions to reach a diverse audience of key stakeholders.

Gauging the **influence** of views expressed by young people in these challenges is the hardest element of Lundy's model to appraise – the nature of the #Pledge2Youth work was altered during 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic and therefore some challenges took place later in the year than planned, giving insufficient time for industry members to enact key changes in their products and services. Logistical delays notwithstanding, some challenges may result in greater influence than others. For example, Sulake's and the LEGO Group's close working relationships with their engaged and impassioned user bases may make it easier for them to roll out new features to raise awareness of key terms and conditions, and SUPER RTL have a tried and tested model of engaging with children throughout the design process through their UX Labs. Samsung's regional approach to youth participation could also enable greater influence if it opts to act on the different recommendations of young people in different countries.

It is difficult to evaluate how Facebook's and Twitter's approaches might lead to active change on those platforms; statistics from October 2020 suggest the Facebook users aged

13-17 make up less than 6 per cent of the total user base on the Facebook platform¹⁷, and are therefore a minority. However, it would be hoped that the needs of youth users on social media platforms would be considered above others, and that any changes made that improve the safety and privacy of youth users would be of benefit to all users, regardless of age. Facebook's and Twitter's commitments (along with those of other members) to continue youth participation activities well beyond the scope of the challenges outlined here demonstrates a recognition of the importance of involving young people in shaping their services.

All industry members who took part in the challenges remarked on the positivity, enthusiasm and passion displayed by the young people. The BIK Youth Ambassadors equally expressed gratitude for the opportunities to work alongside industry, as well as the sense that their voices were being respected and taken seriously.

"Being able to express our concerns directly to the digital platforms we use makes youth feel more empowered in defining the digital spaces we need. A direct line of communication between youth and the digital industry fosters fast development of self-regulatory solutions and increases trust once those solutions roll-out."

João, BIK Youth Ambassador, Portugal

"To actively involve young people in producing and shaping their favourite digital content has been a key demand of positive online content initiatives which has come to life through the BIK Youth Pledge. Witnessing teenagers and providers collaborating on improving content and services has been truly inspiring for me."

Lidia de Reese, Senior Manager Media Literacy Education, FSM

Safer Internet Forum 2020

Each year, a BIK Youth Panel is formed and contributes to the annual Safer Internet Forum (SIF). The 2020 edition of the BIK Youth Panel consisted of 48 young people aged 12-18 from 14 different European countries. Alongside the #Pledge2Youth challenges, the Youth Panel worked in six small groups to consider key issues around the internet, particularly issues around access, disability, equality and ethics. Each group created a short film to highlight their thoughts and opinions around their chosen issue, alongside tips for young people and recommendations for change. While these activities did not take place in collaboration with industry, the breadth of issues covered in the films serve as a timely reminder to all key

¹⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/376128/facebook-global-user-age-distribution/>

stakeholders (such as policy makers, tech companies, NGOs and academia) that there are issues other than general online safety and privacy that young people have concerns about.

The BIK Youth Panellists presented these short films at both a separate side event with members of the Alliance to better protect minors online¹⁸ and during a side event at the Safer Internet Forum, held virtually due to pandemic restrictions.

Below is a brief summary of the issue covered in each group's film, alongside thoughts and views from the BIK Youth Panel 2020:

- **True or False?**

This video depicted a schoolgirl using her phone and encountering different content such as scam advertising, controversial (bordering on hateful) statements and biased views/opinions presented as fact. For each scenario, the viewer could choose whether or not to trust the content. Tips related to that type of content were displayed after each choice, with further advice at the end of the film. In discussion after the film, there was a consensus among the young people involved in making this film that the portrayed issues were the same for many young people in different countries.

- **Human and Ethical**

This video showed young people discussing the ways that minority groups may be treated online and how people are treated badly for being 'different'. The group remarked that this was an issue that wasn't discussed enough and, although it was not a new problem, there was still a long way to go in solving this issue globally. They hoped the video could be used to start a discussion but also to empower people to take a stand against hateful online behaviour.

- **Mental Health and Disabilities**

A powerful video showing young people holding up signs showing the hurtful and hateful language used online against people with mental health issues, learning needs and disabilities. The video concludes with the same young people holding up signs showing messages of support that could be used to counteract the negative messages. The group were very passionate about this issue and urged everyone to do more to combat this discrimination online.

- **Future Internet: Education on and off the internet**

This video used hand-drawn animations to highlight the pressing need for greater sex education in schools. In the video, the group remark on the dangers of young people looking to porn for education on sex and relationships. The group explained that studying online during the pandemic has highlighted the need for greater sex education by schools. They also pointed to the opportunities that technology presents in delivering sex education such as promoting good quality educational resources and using social media to highlight positive messages from NGOs and online influencers.

¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/alliance-better-protect-minors-online>

- **Future Internet: Timeline of technological and communicative advancement**

This video attempted to answer the question 'Are we going to be safe in a world of future technology?' through posing questions and things to consider. It highlighted the past, present and possible future of technology, and what possible issues might exist in the future such as greater digital dependency and the role of artificial intelligence. The group also advised caution. The group remarked that, while it is hard to predict the future, you can look to the past for patterns of behaviour. They also posed the question of how much technology should influence humans and how much we should use it.

- **Future Internet: Teacher education**

This video depicts four young people on a video chat discussing the ways that technical issues and teachers' technical ability had affected their education during lockdown. It highlights the frustrations they have with outdated educational technology and some gaps in teachers' knowledge in using technology to educate. The group explained that these came from their first-hand experiences during lockdown in their respective countries. The group remarked that 'school is your second home' and therefore there is a pressing need for effective online classes, teacher training, and for schools to consider how they use technology in education.

"We decided to focus on the future of education in the digital age because we are all students; education is a big part of our lives. Improving that for our children, our brothers and sisters is a really important topic for us, because we know how good or bad it could be: we have seen teachers doing an amazing job at teaching online during quarantine, but we have also seen some for whom the transition has been really bad, they really struggled."

Neda, BIK Youth Panellist 2020, Lithuania

Other considerations for meaningful youth participation

The examples included in this report highlight the immense benefits and opportunities that engaging in meaningful youth participation can bring to the tech and internet industry in shaping their products and services, not only to further meet the needs of their youth users but to benefit the entire user base.

However, this process doesn't happen naturally – it requires clear planning, direction and execution to ensure that the involvement of children and young people is meaningful. Reflecting upon the co-design challenges and activities undertaken by industry under the BIK Youth Pledge programme, here are some further points to consider when approaching youth participation to bring about positive change in an online platform or service:

- **Strategic thinking** – The most successful plans are those that consider the short, medium, and long term, and youth participation is no exception. Establishing a clear purpose for seeking the views and recommendations of young people is important to ensure that any youth participation efforts do not end up becoming tokenistic in nature, and that the process is viewed as continually ongoing, rather than finite.
- **Communicating decisions made** – The last of Lundy's four key elements is influence, and it is the most difficult to achieve yet just as important as the preceding elements. Part of demonstrating influence in youth participation is ensuring that the decisions made (and the reasons for them) are communicated to the young people. This must be considered carefully – both in terms of the best method of communication (for example, written, verbal, visual, and so on) and in the level of detail and language used in the feedback. Several of the examples highlighted in this report demonstrated that children and young people find complex legalistic language difficult to comprehend, so any explanations need to take age and development of young people into consideration. Equally, overly simplistic responses may prompt distrust, disengagement or a slew of follow up questions, so judging the level of detail to include is also crucial.
- **Representation** – A sometimes overlooked but particularly important consideration is whether the young people who participate are sufficiently representative of the whole youth user base. It can often be the case that the young people who volunteer for participation activities may be the most engaged, confident and articulate. When working with education partners such as schools, they may often select the most academically talented students for participation. Of course, these young people have a right to express their views and have their voice listened to, but they may not convey the breadth of views that working with other young people might unlock. There are reasons why some young people can't or won't engage in youth participation activities, and possible additional needs, accessibility issues and disabilities that might act as barriers to participation are important to consider.
- **Localisation** – For multinational/global services, the experiences and feedback of youth in one country or region may not reflect those of young people in another. Facebook's ongoing Youth Ambassador programme and research feedback programmes cover some of the countries with the biggest user bases,

while regions such as Africa, South America and Asia are not represented at all. Therefore, consideration must be given to how and where to effect change – a global change should benefit *all* youth users (and possibly all users in general) whereas more localised changes need to accurately reflect the needs of youth in that country/region. In some cases, a threshold may need to be established to decide whether localised feedback results in a localised or global change.

- **'It's too difficult/complicated...'** – Digital products and services are often complicated by nature, but it is important to move away from the mindset that young people's recommendations cannot be put into practice because it would be too difficult or complicated, or because 'they don't really understand the product/service'. While there will always be limitations as to what can be achieved (be they financial, logistical, legal or other), dismissing young people's ideas out of hand overlooks the unique and valuable perspective they bring to how a digital product/service is used. The most successful online services of recent years have been agile ones, that change and shape themselves to the needs of their users, many of which are young people. Explaining clearly and honestly to young people why a change cannot be made at that time keeps the discussion going, which can open up alternative solutions or new ways of thinking that might produce a workable answer.

The experiences and initiatives provided in this report provide an insight into how collaboration with children and young people can provide real value and ongoing benefits to service providers as well as their users. This approach aligns well with the European Commission's aims to improve the quality and accessibility of online services for all EU citizens. Successful collaboration must be an ongoing process and the ways in which online service providers can embed age-appropriate design into their products and services is an area that requires further exploration in the future.

Further information about the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) youth participation activities, including the work of the BIK Youth Ambassadors, can be found at www.bikyouth.eu.

The Better Internet for Kids portal at www.betterinternetforkids.eu provides information, guidance and resources on better internet issues from the joint Insafe-INHOPE network of Safer Internet Centres in Europe, and other key stakeholders.

European Schoolnet would like to thank everyone who contributed to the creation of this guide and associated activities.