Growing up ONLINE

Building a digital future
for minors, by minors

Content

Empower young people, improve the market

For today's European minors, growing up means growing up online. The internet is where they look for information, connect with friends, explore hobbies and shape their identities. Unfortunately, it is also where they are exposed to cybercrime, misinformation, data exploitation and addiction.

Risks to children in the digital era are nothing new and well documented. It is only natural that grown-ups want to take action to protect children online. Nor should it come as a surprise that the online safety, well-being and digital rights of minors is currently the focus of policy stakeholders, industry and educators, in Europe and beyond. The problem is clear, the solution not so much.

Minors might be subject to many heated policy debates, often this conversation lacks the voices of the main characters — the young people who we seek to protect. Solutions risk being designed missing the realities of young people's online lives, missing their support, and ultimately also missing their target.

To address this void, Euroconsumers conducted a multi-country covering teenagers between twelve and seventeen years old in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland to hear directly about their experiences, concerns, and needs. The resulting data provide a unique viewpoint into the lives of young people online, a detailed understanding of both the opportunities and challenges teens face, as well as a nuanced take on possible solutions.

With these findings, Euroconsumers wants to ensure that whatever measures are considered to protect teens online, they are "minor-proof", meaning it considers their experiences and expectations. In doing so, it also aims to secure the effectiveness and success of future decisions, firmly rooted in teenagers' understanding and support.

By bringing the voices of teenagers into the conversation, Euroconsumers' ultimate goal is to empower minors and ensure that their perspective shapes the creation of a fair digital ecosystem, one that enables them to enjoy digital innovation in a safe way.

↘ It is time to really listen to what they have to say.

1. What are the kids up to?

After the bell: the active lives of today's teenagers

Despite the popular image of the digitally addicted teen, our survey found young people across Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland lead also dynamic offline lives. When the school day ends, minors don't just head home and scroll, they jump into a variety of after-school activities.

After-school activities practiced in the past 12 months, by age

● 12-14 ● 15-17

Activity	12-14	15-17
Family activities	97%	96%
Meeting with friends	94%	95%
Sports	86%	79%
Taking classes in foreign language, painting/art, etc.	66%	55%
Playing a musical instrument	54%	37%
Volunteering for a social organisation, scout clubs, etc.	40%	35%
Side hustles	32%	34%
Participating in chess club, book club, etc.	36%	27%

From meeting with family or friends to sports, playing music instruments or taking language or art classes, a majority of respondents goes for it at least once a week.

Number of teens practicing after-school activities: once a week or more*

Activity	Percentage
Meeting with friends	79%
Sports	79%
Taking classes in foreign language, painting/art, etc.	75%
Familiy activities	70%
Playing a musical instrument	60%
Participating in chess club, book club, etc.	53%
Side hustles	52%
Volunteering for a social organisation, scout clubs, etc.	51%
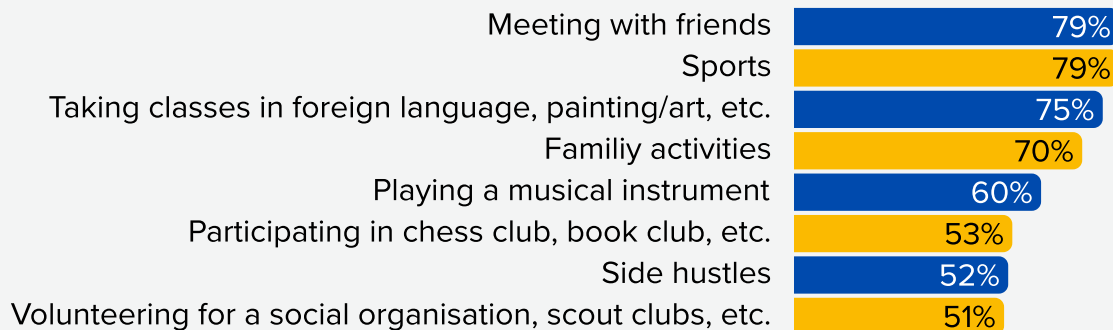
*Among the ones practicing after-school activities

Girls and younger respondents aged 12 to 14 tend to stand out as slightly more active. But not all minors have equal opportunities. Those living in financially difficult situations are less likely to be involved in structured activities like team sports, music, art or language lessons and scouts.

The in-between generation: online and offline in motion

Next to an active offline life, today's minors are also deeply connected to the digital world - nearly every minor (96%) uses a smartphone to access the internet. And that's not all, most also connect through at least one other device: a personal computer or laptop (67%), tablet (34%) or gaming console (27%). Male respondents living in a financially comfortable household tend to use the widest variety of devices.

3

On average, minors claim to spend 3.2 hours online daily. While almost half of the respondents (48%) say to log on between 2 and 4 hours, almost one in three (29%) also stays connected for more than 4 hours each day. This percentage even goes up for teens aged fifteen and more and those living in a household with financial difficulties. This paints a picture of a busy, connected generation constantly moving between real-life and digital worlds.

In average, how many hours do you spend online?

	12-14	15-17
Total	3.1	3.3
Belgium	2.9	3.2
Italy	3.0	3.2
Poland	3.4	3.8
Portugal	3.3	3.5
Spain	2.8	3.1
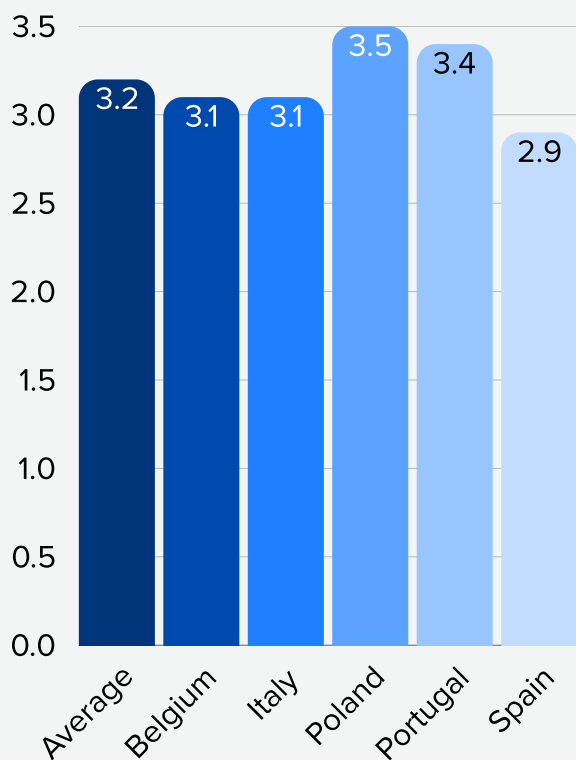
Average number of hours spent online per day, per age

More than memes: why minors log on

What do you enjoy the most about digital devices and the Internet?

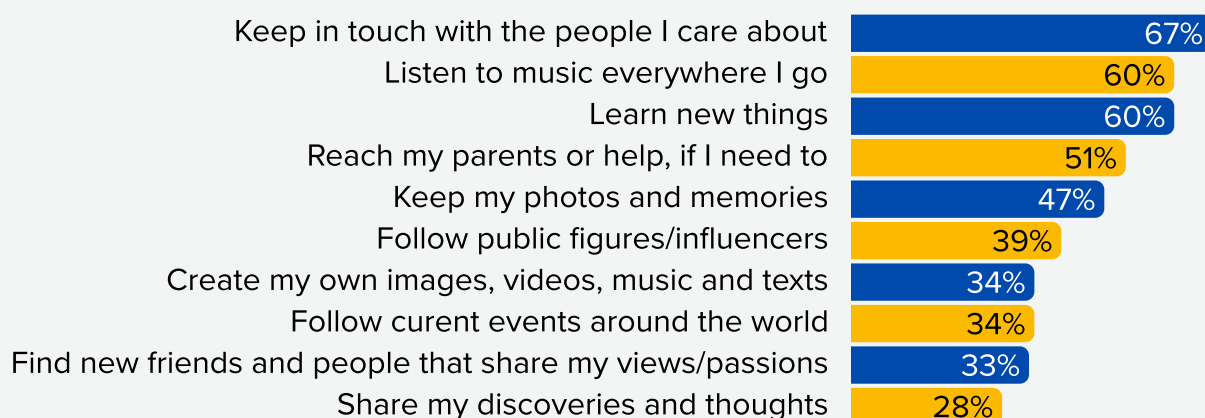|	
Keep in touch with the people I care about	67%
Listen to music everywhere I go	60%
Learn new things	60%
Reach my parents or help, if I need to	51%
Keep my photos and memories	47%
Follow public figures/influencers	39%
Create my own images, videos, music and texts	34%
Follow curent events around the world	34%
Find new friends and people that share my views/passions	33%
Share my discoveries and thoughts	28%

For teens the internet is far more than just entertainment: it is about connecting, learning, creating and expressing themselves.

When asked what they enjoy the most, **social connection** prevails with 67% indicating it is a way to stay in touch with the people they care about, but also to follow public figures/influencers or find new friends to share views and passions with. But they also value it as a **source of creativity** with teens using it to listen to music everywhere they go or create their own images, videos, music etc.
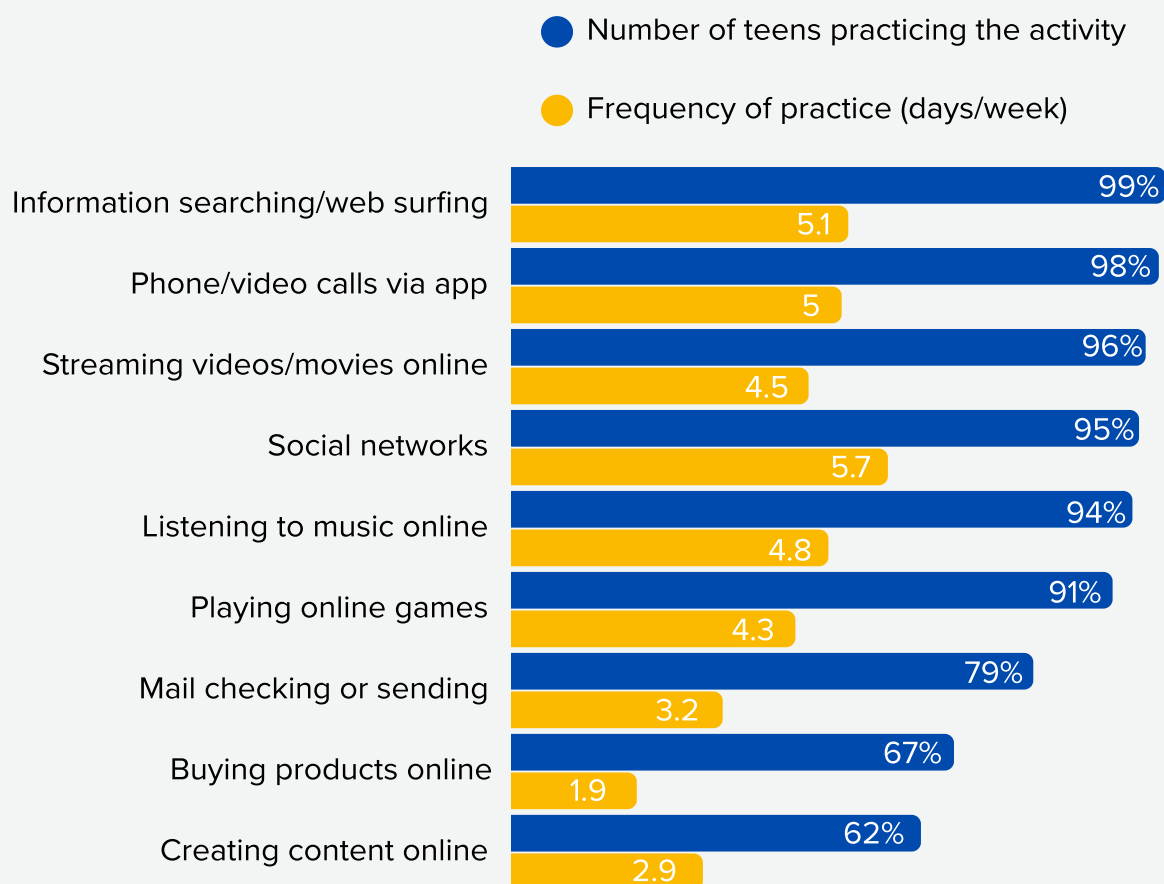
Importantly, 6 out of 10 respondents pointed out the opportunity to learn new things or to follow sports, politics, events all around the world, an important reminder that the digital world is a **gateway to knowledge and new skills.** Next to also flagging the **practical convenience** of it all: it is a way to reach the parents or help if needed and i.e. store their memories and pictures.

Minors' digital playground: a blend of habits and interests

The appreciation of teenagers for what digital has to offer is directly reflected by how they spend their time online: a fascinating mixture of different activities, ranging from surfing the web looking for information and learning things, over streaming, to creating their own content.

Teens' online activities

● Number of teens practicing the activity

● Frequency of practice (days/week)

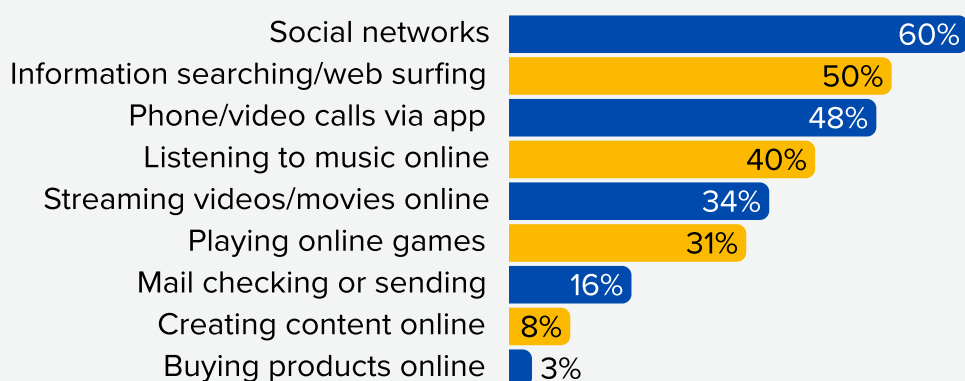| Activity	%	Days/week
Information searching/web surfing	99%	5.1
Phone/video calls via app	98%	5
Streaming videos/movies online	96%	4.5
Social networks	95%	5.7
Listening to music online	94%	4.8
Playing online games	91%	4.3
Mail checking or sending	79%	3.2
Buying products online	67%	1.9
Creating content online	62%	2.9

Most activities have become part of their daily routine. Half of all respondents go online every day to check the web (50%) or call via an app (48%). 6 out of 10 checks social networks daily. Also streaming movies (Youtube, Netflix, Disney+,..) and music (Spotify,...) or playing online games are among the most popular daily digital habits.

On the contrary, email, shopping online or creating content (blogging, TikTok videos,...) seem to be less of a daily habit, although they still are notable and common digital activities.

Number of teens practicing following online activities everyday

Activity	Percentage
Social networks	60%
Information searching/web surfing	50%
Phone/video calls via app	48%
Listening to music online	40%
Streaming videos/movies online	34%
Playing online games	31%
Mail checking or sending	16%
Creating content online	8%
Buying products online	3%

↘ **Interestingly, the number of online activities does not negatively impact teenagers' offline behaviour.** On the contrary. More active teens - those who take part in a wide variety of after-school activities - also practice a wider range of online activities and do it more frequently.

The frequency also goes up as children grow older. In other words, our online usage grows with us.
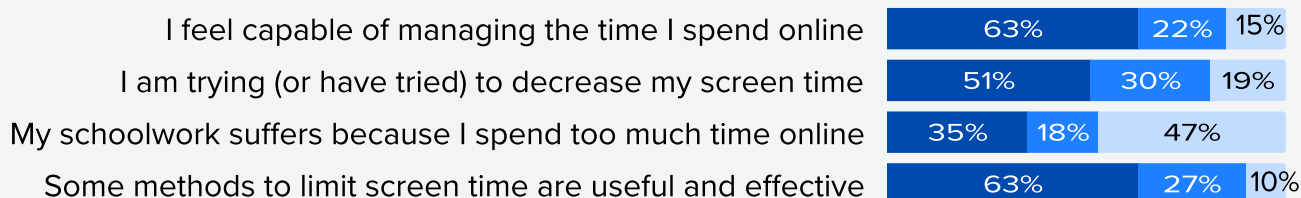
Minors vs. screens: "I can handle it"

In the battle for balance, our survey respondents showcase an **interesting level of self-awareness** of the problem, together with considerable **confidence to handle it**.

One in three minors (36%) acknowledge that the time spent online takes a toll on their school performance, with Belgium even peaking at 53%. However, at the same time almost half (47%) denies any negative impact on their school grades.

Many are aware of the effects of their online behaviour. In fact, half of the respondents have already tried, or is currently trying, to reduce their screen time, which illustrates a growing interest in healthy digital habits. Here as well numbers seem to be influenced by household finances. Minors from financially comfortable families are more likely to cut back screentime (57%), while those facing financial difficulties are less likely to try and limit their time online (43%).

Attitudes towards the amount of time spent online

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I feel capable of managing the time I spend online	63%	22%	15%
I am trying (or have tried) to decrease my screen time	51%	30%	19%
My schoolwork suffers because I spend too much time online	35%	18%	47%
Some methods to limit screen time are useful and effective	63%	27%	10%

● Agree   ● Neutral   ● Disagree

Still, most minors show an "I can handle it" attitude and feel confident they can manage their screen use. Around 63% say they are in control, yet it must be noted that even among this group nearly one in four spends more than four hours online every day.

Respondents' call for accountability and agency over their own screen time is reflected by their use of tools like screen time trackers and usage limits. Almost two out of three (63%) appreciate these tools as useful and effective to empower them to limit screen time.

2. The many faces of teens' online life

2.1. Social media

The more the merrier

Social media and teens, the one goes with the other. Almost all respondents have used a social media app or platform in the past 12 months. And they do not stick to merely one: 80% of respondents in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland is active on at least four different platforms.

The most popular are WhatsApp (93%) and YouTube (92%), followed by Instagram (82%), TikTok (69%), Facebook (60%) and Snapchat (42%). The more social media accounts, the more minors spend time online.

Respondents who started using social media platforms before the age of 13

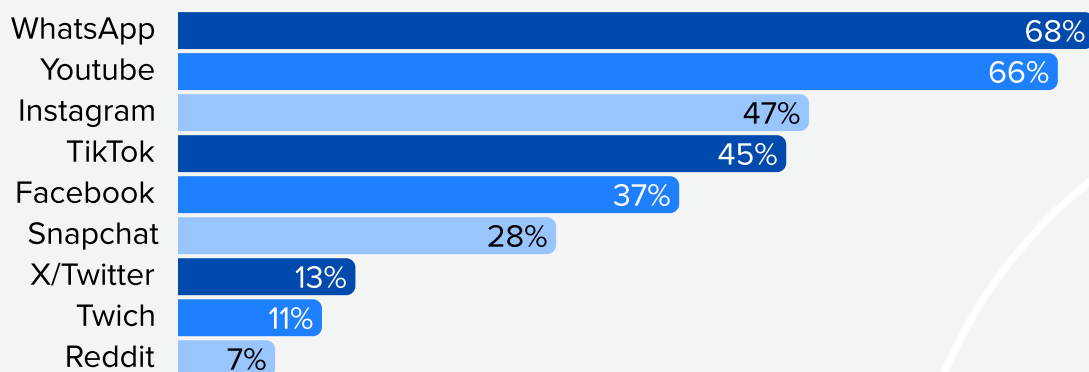| Platform	Percentage
Youtube	75%
WhatsApp	69%
Instagram	52%
TikTok	46%
Facebook	40%
Snapchat	30%
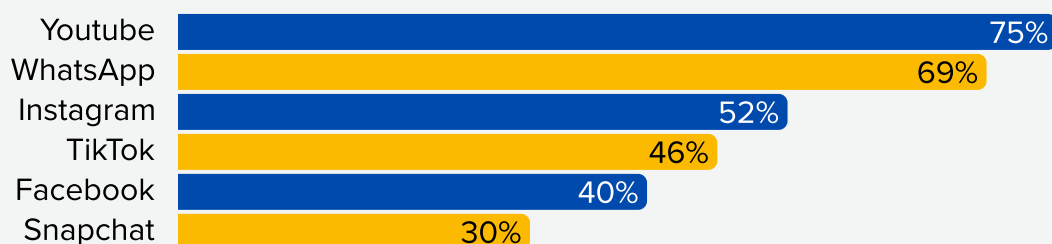
Off to an early start

Clearly social media is central to minor's everyday life. And they start early! Even with age restrictions in place. Three out of four of the surveyed teens started on YouTube before age 13; 14% even before their 8th birthday. A similar **pattern of early adoption - before age 13** - is observed for WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and Snapchat.

This is highly significant when you consider that most of these platforms have a minimum age limit of at least 13 years old in place – only YouTube has a separate offering for children under thirteen. What makes it even more striking is that i.e. 68% of respondents aged 12 connect to WhatsApp with their own account; percentages are equally high for other platforms. This indicates that **current age verification systems are not performing**, but also that **minors feel the need to circumvent** age restrictions.

Owning a social media account at age of 12

Platform	Percentage
WhatsApp	68%
Youtube	66%
Instagram	47%
TikTok	45%
Facebook	37%
Snapchat	28%
X/Twitter	13%
Twich	11%
Reddit	7%

Always on my mind

Social media usage runs deep: 65% of surveyed minors access their platforms whenever they can. The fact that 70% say they **feel satisfied with their relationship with friends when using social media**, shows the importance of social media for their day-to-day life and network.

However, at the same time 42% also feel **bored** when they cannot use it. Some even indicate to feel **anxious** if they don't receive messages or notifications for a while (28%) or if peers do not react to the content they posted online (25%).

Social on and offline

Again, there seems to be a direct, positive correlation between teens on and offline activities. Teens that meet more frequently with friends at the park or at home also engage more with social media and use a wider range of social media apps or platforms. Social media engagement is also higher with those living in urban settings (more than 50.000 inhabitants) - maybe because there are likely more activities on offer - compared to those living in smaller cities.

2.2. Video games

Something for everyone

Video gaming is common among minors: 85% of respondents in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland plays. Especially boys between 12 and 16 years old from financially comfortable backgrounds, where this rate goes up to even 96%. But it is not just a boys' thing: also 77% of the surveyed girls play video games.

Can you handle it? Mixed messages

Again here, most teens feel they can handle it: 65% of respondents indicate they can control the amount of time spent gaming. At the same time **almost half (45%) admit they have hidden the time spent gaming** i.e. from their parents. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is indeed real for over 1 out of 3 respondents, affecting the younger ones even slightly more (40%).
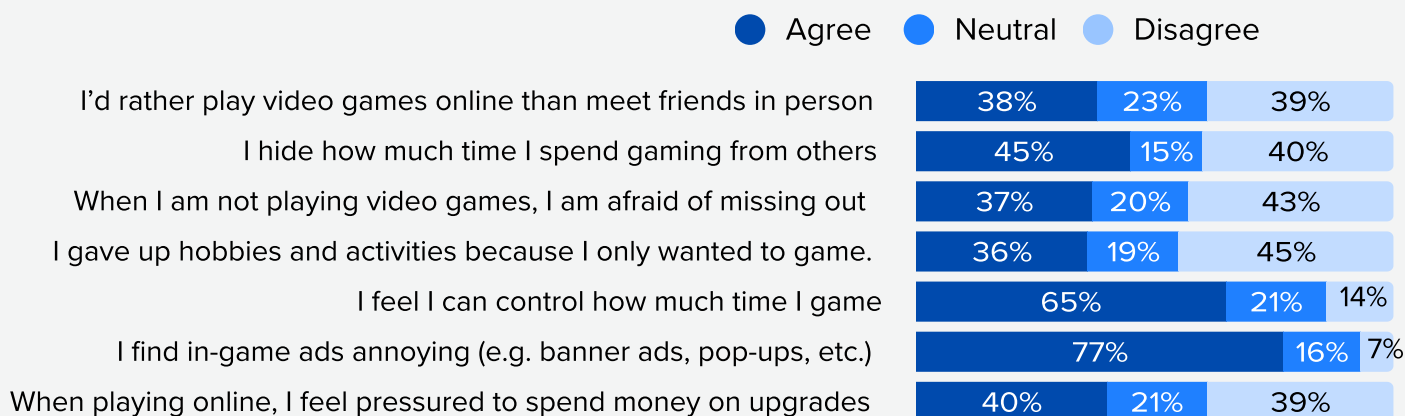
An equal number of surveyed teens admit they have lost interest in hobbies or other activities because gaming was all they wanted to do (36%) and prefer to play online rather than physically meet up with friends (38%). However, it must be said that at the same time an almost equal number of respondents rejects these statements and ignores FOMO, hiding or neglecting other hobbies and friends.

The commercial pitfalls of gaming

There seems to be a common feeling among the minors: **they do not like in-game advertising** like banner ads, pop-ups etc. 77% simply finds it annoying. Even more worrisome is that four out of ten respondents indicate they feel the need to spend (more) money on in-game features or upgrades, i.e. to unlock extra levels.

Attitudes towards video games

● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I'd rather play video games online than meet friends in person	38%	23%	39%
I hide how much time I spend gaming from others	45%	15%	40%
When I am not playing video games, I am afraid of missing out	37%	20%	43%
I gave up hobbies and activities because I only wanted to game.	36%	19%	45%
I feel I can control how much time I game	65%	21%	14%
I find in-game ads annoying (e.g. banner ads, pop-ups, etc.)	77%	16%	7%
When playing online, I feel pressured to spend money on upgrades	40%	21%	39%

Among video game players

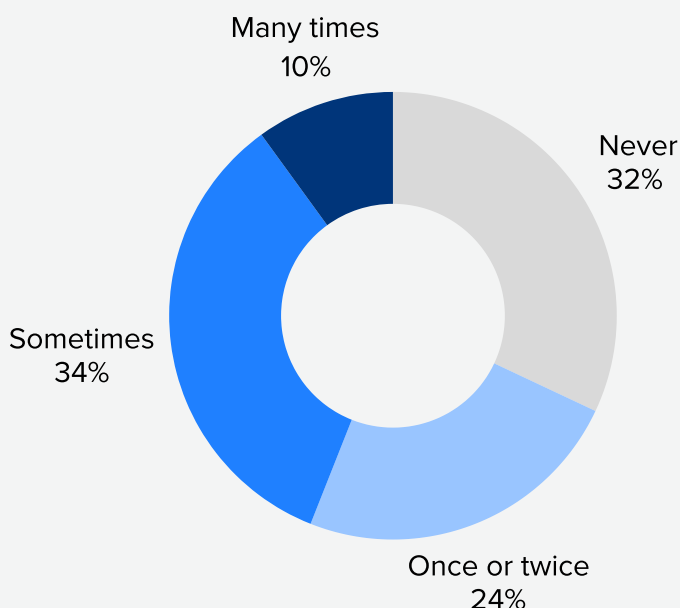## 2.3. Influencers

Follow for follow

Following influencers online is the new reality: 80% of minors report they do so. This ranges from 71% in Italy to 87% in Portugal and is on average more common among minors living in a more comfortable financial situation (85%). While boys are more drawn to gaming and sports content, girls tend to favour topics such as fashion, beauty, lifestyle, food, and wellbeing. Respondents between 12 and 14 years old are slightly more interested in tips related to self-esteem and body-positivity.

It's business

Have you ever bought a product or service based on an influencer's suggestion?

Many times
10%

Never
32%

Sometimes
34%

Once or twice
24%

The influencer culture has a strong commercial dimension. Nearly seven in ten of the surveyed teens who follow public figures and influencers online (68%) indicate that they have bought a product or service promoted by influencers at least once, one out of ten (10%) even many times.

These figures suggest that influencers not only shape trends and interests but also exert peer and market pressure on young audiences. It's business. But are teens able to detect when an influencer is promoting a product or service because they are paid to do so? Not everyone and not all the time. **43% says they always or frequently can spot it**, but an almost equal amount (40%) can only sometimes detect ads, while 13% say they rarely or never recognize it.

2.4. Personalisation and targeted ads

Caught in the algorithm

When asked about social media algorithms, mixed feelings prevail. First of all, there seems to be little awareness about their presence: 42% of respondents do not perceive that algorithms are regulating their feed as they scroll through apps and platforms.
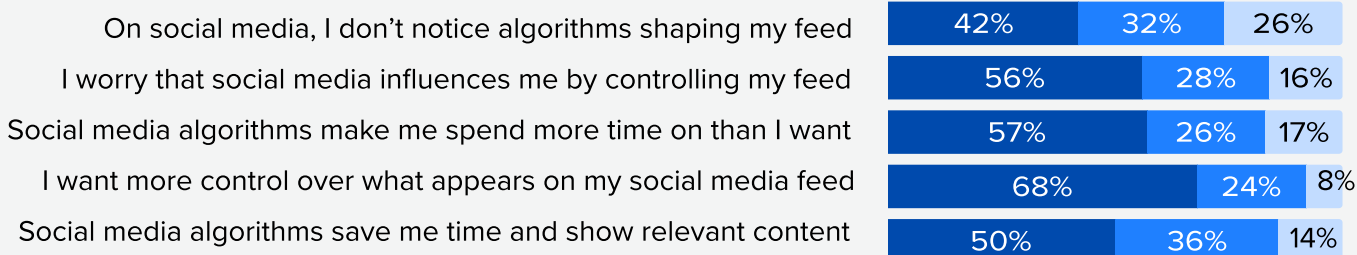
Respondents' appreciation about algorithms is double: while half of them (50%) believe it saves them time and provide relevant content, half of them (56%) is also **concerned about how social media influences their thoughts and behaviours** by deciding what they get to see. Concerns also extend beyond content curation to time spent online. Over half of the surveyed minors (57%) believe algorithms encourage them to spend more time on social media than they intended; only 17% disagrees with this presumption.
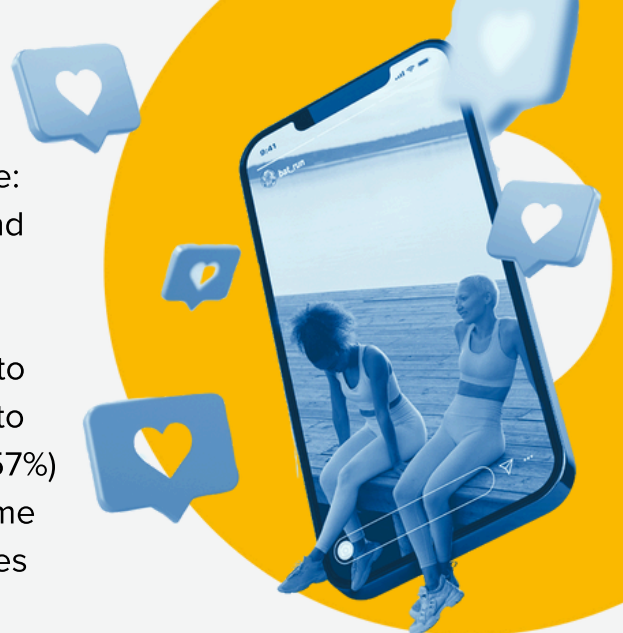
There seems to be a big consensus on a **call for more control and empowerment**. Two out of three minors in our survey would like to have more direct influence on what they get to see in their feed.

Attitudes towards social media algorithms

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
On social media, I don't notice algorithms shaping my feed	42%	32%	26%
I worry that social media influences me by controlling my feed	56%	28%	16%
Social media algorithms make me spend more time on than I want	57%	26%	17%
I want more control over what appears on my social media feed	68%	24%	8%
Social media algorithms save me time and show relevant content	50%	36%	14%

● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree
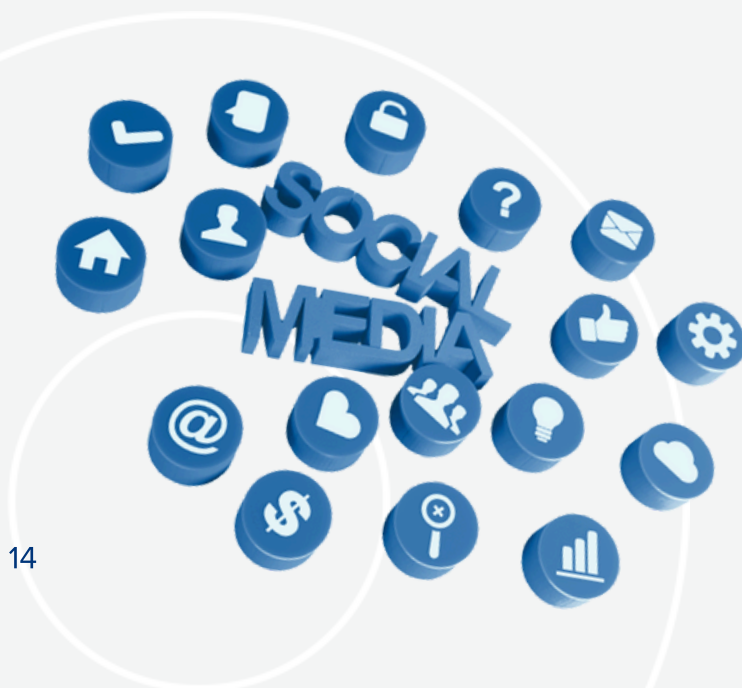
Ads that know me

Taking personalization one step further to personalised ads, the same mixed feelings pop up in the survey results. On the positive side, nearly half of respondents (46%) find these ads usually appropriate and useful. On the downside 43% admits they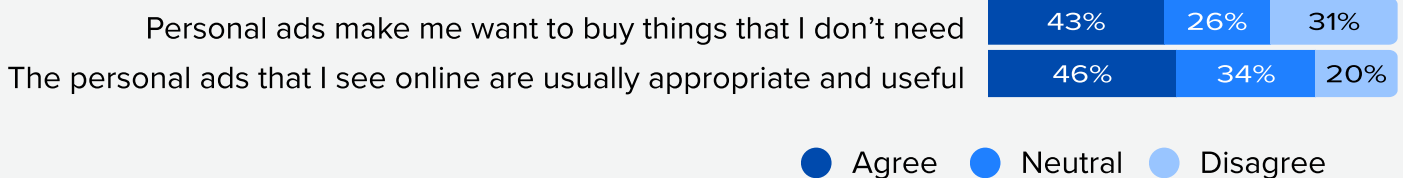 end up buying more than they need because of targeted advertising. It looks like minors tend to recognise that algorithms can effectively deliver content tailored to their interests, but they equally remain wary about the influence this has on their behaviour.

Attitudes towards personalised advertising

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Personal ads make me want to buy things that I don't need	43%	26%	31%
The personal ads that I see online are usually appropriate and useful	46%	34%	20%

● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree

2.5. Generative AI

GenAI is already mainstream

Generative AI tools are no strangers for minors, almost everyone surveyed (98%) knows about them. Only one in five (18%) has never used them, on the contrary, **68% of the teenagers in our survey uses GenAI** ranging from occasionally to even daily. This is particularly higher among minors from financially comfortable households. This rapid uptake, so soon after such tools entered the mainstream, shows that minors are curious, adaptable, and open to new innovations.
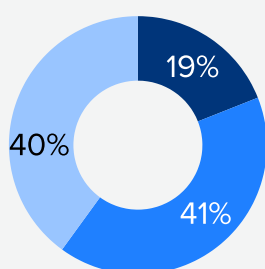
Spot the fake

However, new technologies also bring new risks and challenges like fake news or AI generated videos and images. Although the respondents overall feel quite confident they are able to spot them, almost **one in five minors** admit they **struggle to detect fake news**. This percentage grows with AI-generated content, like fake texts and deepfake videos.

To what extent do you feel able to detect that an online content is a...?

Fake news

Fake text
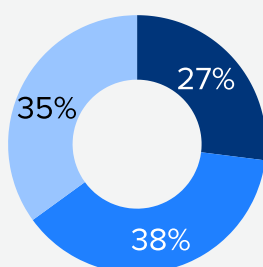
Fake photo/image

Fake video

Fake news: 19% / 41% / 40%

Fake text: 27% / 38% / 35%

Fake photo/image: 22% / 35% / 43%

Fake video: 26% / 34% / 40%

■ Never/Seldom/Don't know   ■ Sometimes   ■ Frequently/Always

3. Better savvy than sorry: staying safe online

The savvy generation?

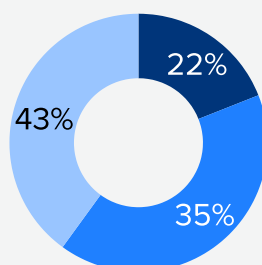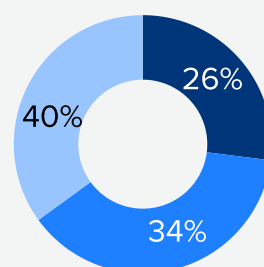Minors surveyed in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland appear to be quite savvy about the challenges that come with their online life. Around **half of them claim to be well informed about the risks** connected to their online activities (54%), how to protect their personal information (54%), and even on how to react in case they fall victim to a cybercrime (48%). Their confidence level goes up with age, when living in medium or large urban areas and coming from comfortable financial backgrounds.

But that's not an enough reason to just lean back. We need to do better. After all, around one third of all respondents feel only moderately informed. When it comes for example to responding in case of a cybercrime, one in five minors (21%) even say to be poorly informed.

Cautious social media habits

Especially social media users show a strong awareness of online risks and adopt a diverse toolbox of actions to protect themselves, going from being careful about the content they share, over verifying friends and filtering out unknown senders, to limiting location tracking and adapting privacy settings.

↘ Despite this understanding of the risks, **30% of social media users admit to providing a false age** when signing up for platforms.

In general, when you use (social media) apps/platforms, do you adapt the following behaviors?

Behavior	%
I am careful about what images and videos I share online	90%
I am careful about the information that I share online	86%
I check friend or follow requests to confirm people's identities	84%
I filter out messages from unknown senders	82%
I restrict apps' access to my location	78%
I adapt the privacy settings of my apps	74%
I indicate my real age when registering for the app/platform	70%
I use my real name and/or personal details	62%
I read the terms and conditions before registering	51%
I have multiple accounts on the same social media platform	33%

Mama knows best

Most teens (83%) report having **parental restrictions** or rules regulating their online activities. The most common ones are parents monitoring teen' social media profiles and posts, requiring permission before purchasing or installing apps, setting screen-time limits or and blocking access to certain apps or platforms.
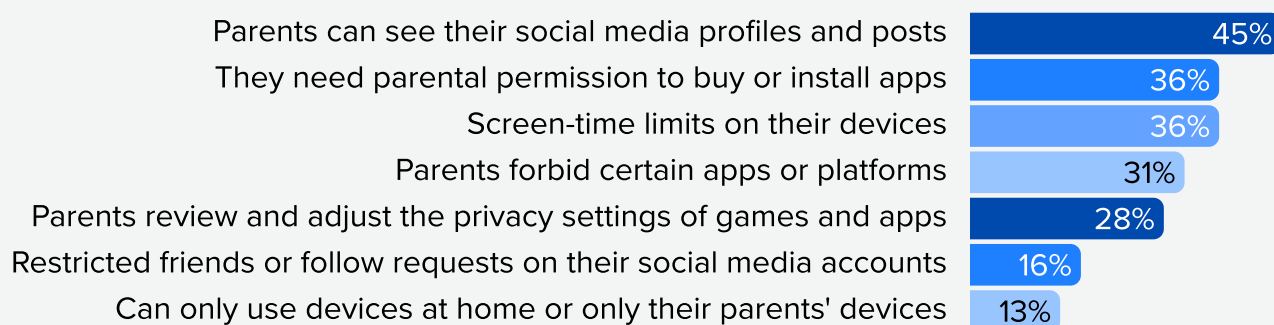
Restrictions or rules by the parents, to regulate minors' online activities

Parents can see their social media profiles and posts	45%
They need parental permission to buy or install apps	36%
Screen-time limits on their devices	36%
Parents forbid certain apps or platforms	31%
Parents review and adjust the privacy settings of games and apps	28%
Restricted friends or follow requests on their social media accounts	16%
Can only use devices at home or only their parents' devices	13%

Younger respondents (aged 12 to 14) are more likely to have these rules in place (89%) compared to older ones (76%). Although minors from financially comfortable households tend to be put a bit more 'under control' (86%), also 3 out 4 living in more difficult financial situations experience parental control (77%).

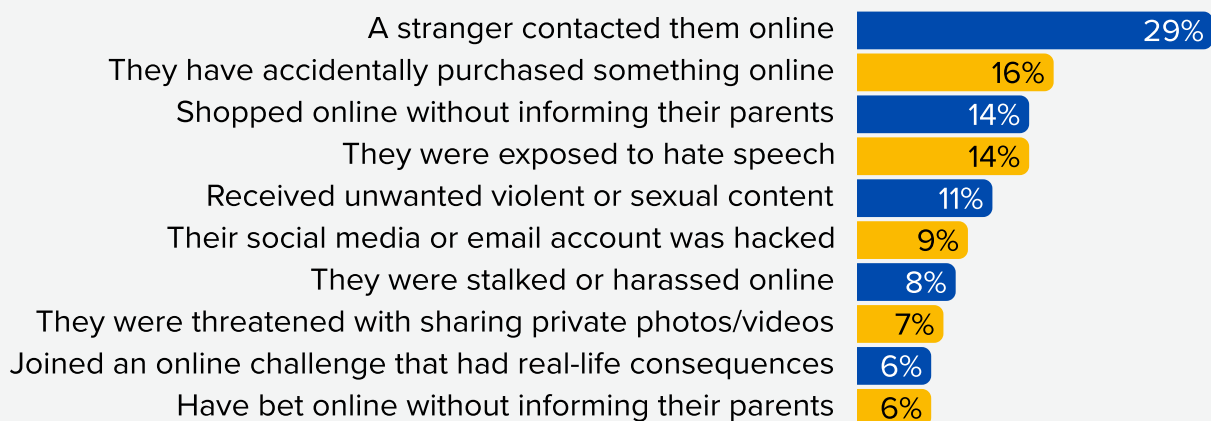Still, this implies that around a quarter of all respondents aged 15-17 and those in less affluent households do not have any restriction at all. Moreover, **12% of minors in our survey admit to using strategies or tools to bypass parental control mechanisms**. This behaviour is even more common among younger social media savvy respondents (12 to 14 years old) where 22% admits circumventing the rules.

The risk is real

Have the following situations happened to you?

Situation	Percentage
A stranger contacted them online	29%
They have accidentally purchased something online	16%
Shopped online without informing their parents	14%
They were exposed to hate speech	14%
Received unwanted violent or sexual content	11%
Their social media or email account was hacked	9%
They were stalked or harassed online	8%
They were threatened with sharing private photos/videos	7%
Joined an online challenge that had real-life consequences	6%
Have bet online without informing their parents	6%

However, protecting themselves or having parents 'have an eye on it' is no luxury: the online threats are real! Nearly half of minors in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland (46%) have already encountered at least one.

A stranger contacting minors online is not just a newspaper story, for 29% of respondents, even the ones aged 12-14 years old, it has been a real-life experience. This number doesn't necessarily reflect bad intentions - some of them could of course be minors as well, reaching out i.e. to join an online game - but at least it indicates it seems to be easy for strangers to reach out. Equally, the number of teens reading hate speech (14%) or receiving unsolicited violent or sexually explicit messages (11%) is disturbing.

Unfortunately, the online environment also gives leeway to cyberbullying, with 8% confessing someone stalked or repeatedly harassed them online and 7% having already received threats to share or publish intimate photos/videos without their consent.

Online bad experiences do not only impact teenagers' physical or emotional integrity, sometimes it comes with financial implications. 16% indicate they already bought or activated a paid service unintentionally and 14% admits having shopped online without informing their parents.

(self)Protection matters

Exposure is higher among those who use a broader range of social media platforms and whose parents do not oversee their online activity. 54% of the teens who are very active on social media and do not have parental restrictions or rules for their online activities encountered already at least one online threat. Encouragingly, the data shows that young social media users who practice more online safety habits tend to face fewer threats.

4. Digital gatekeepers: minors weigh in on online regulation

Balancing safety and freedom

Despite feeling confident, self-conscious and savvy online, most minors (82%) do agree that restrictions need to be in place to prevent minors from accessing inappropriate content online.
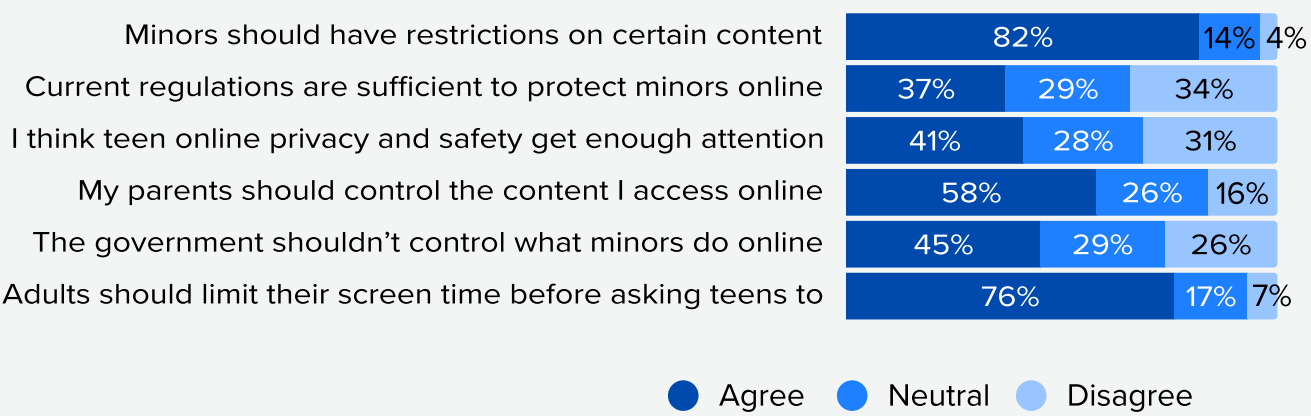
Are current regulations enough? One-third (37%) believe they are, another one-third (34%) believe they are not. Especially younger respondents (12–14 years) are more likely to say there is too much focus on safety and privacy (43%), older teens (15–17 years) tend to be a bit more critical.

Interestingly, **58% of all respondents believe it is up to the parents to have the final say** – a view that is strongest among younger ones (63%). There is less appetite for government interference: almost half (45%) believe it is not up to them to decide what minors can and cannot do online.

Finally, the teens surveyed by Euroconsumers decided to also hold up a mirror to the adults. A whopping 76% think grown-ups should do some introspection first, 'walk the talk' and limit their own screen time before asking their kids to do the same.

Attitudes towards regulation of minors' online activities

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Minors should have restrictions on certain content	82%	14%	4%
Current regulations are sufficient to protect minors online	37%	29%	34%
I think teen online privacy and safety get enough attention	41%	28%	31%
My parents should control the content I access online	58%	26%	16%
The government shouldn't control what minors do online	45%	29%	26%
Adults should limit their screen time before asking teens to	76%	17%	7%

● Agree   ● Neutral   ● Disagree

Extra rules? What works and what doesn't

Despite having mixed feelings about extra regulation, when confronted with a list of possible new measures to ensure their online safety, minors generally see value in them. Especially initiatives that directly empower minors or offer protection by default are rated the most useful.

In particular, the idea of having inappropriate content blurred below a certain age ranks high (64% finds it very useful), conveying a **clear message to platforms and apps that it is up to them to keep minors safe**. The support as well for specific default settings for minors' accounts, like turning off notifications, autoplay and infinite scroll or limiting messages of strangers goes in that direction.
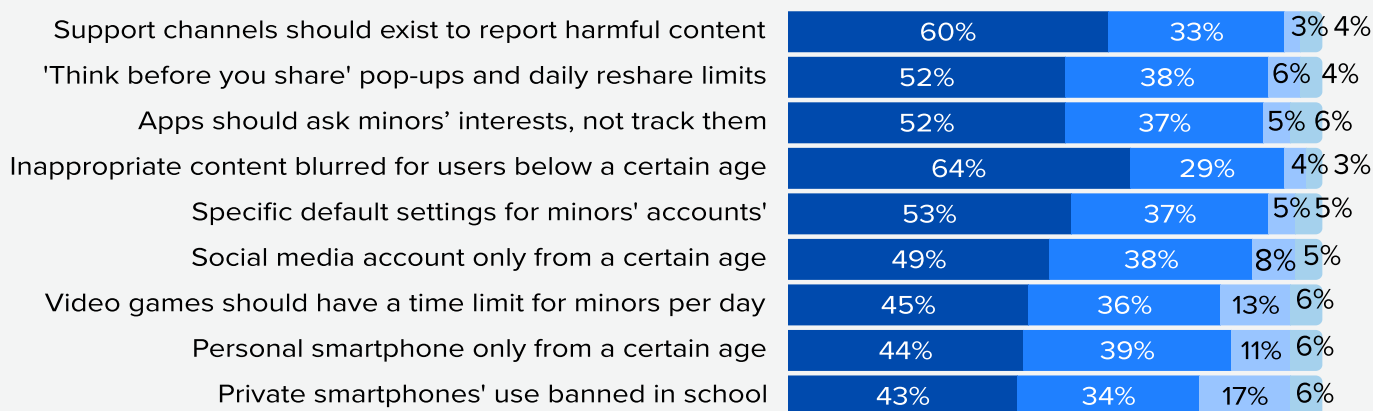
The fact that 93% finds it useful - 60% even very useful - for minors to have a dedicated support, report and complain channel echoes a **loud call for empowerment**. Same goes for the support for positive friction, such as "Think before you share" pop-ups and limits on the number of reshares per day. This quest for empowerment is confirmed by a clear message from respondents in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Poland: apps and platforms should ask teens what they are interested in instead of monitoring their online activity.

Measures that imply some kind of ban - be it time limiting video games or blocking smartphone and social media use below a certain age – **can count on less appetite**, although also here there is still support. A ban on the private use of smartphones at school is the least popular.

Usefulness of regulatory initiatives

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not useful	No opinion
Support channels should exist to report harmful content	60%	33%	3%	4%
'Think before you share' pop-ups and daily reshare limits	52%	38%	6%	4%
Apps should ask minors' interests, not track them	52%	37%	5%	6%
Inappropriate content blurred for users below a certain age	64%	29%	4%	3%
Specific default settings for minors' accounts'	53%	37%	5%	5%
Social media account only from a certain age	49%	38%	8%	5%
Video games should have a time limit for minors per day	45%	36%	13%	6%
Personal smartphone only from a certain age	44%	39%	11%	6%
Private smartphones' use banned in school	43%	34%	17%	6%

● Very useful   ● Somewhat useful
● Not useful   ● No opinion

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# Age restrictions? Yes, but not for me

When talking about protecting minors online, it quickly lands on a debate around age restrictions. A majority of teens surveyed indeed thinks that it is a good idea... as long as it doesn't apply to them.

A ban on social media accounts before a certain age? The table below shows that at age 12 teens still have mixed opinions. Half think they should be older than twelve to have an account, while one out three (32%) think twelve is a suitable age and one out of five believe they should even have access earlier on. The older the respondents get, the more they believe a ban is "useful, but for minors younger than me". For example, at age 16 support for a ban is almost non-existent.
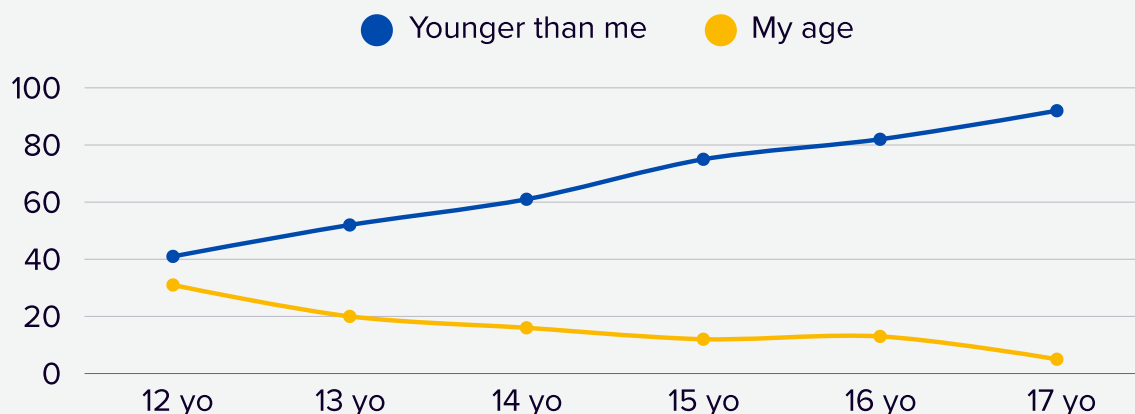
Minors should only be able to have a social media account from a certain age
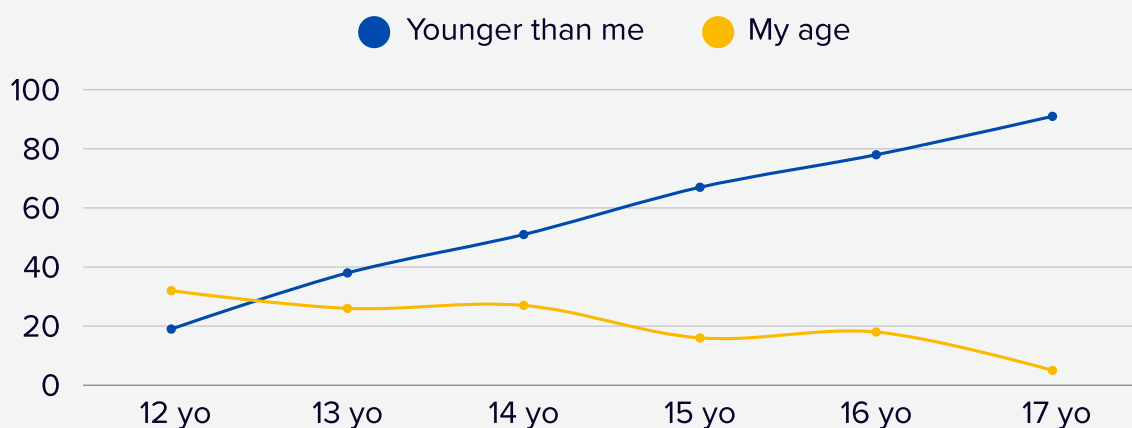
Minors should only be able to have a personal smartphone from a certain age
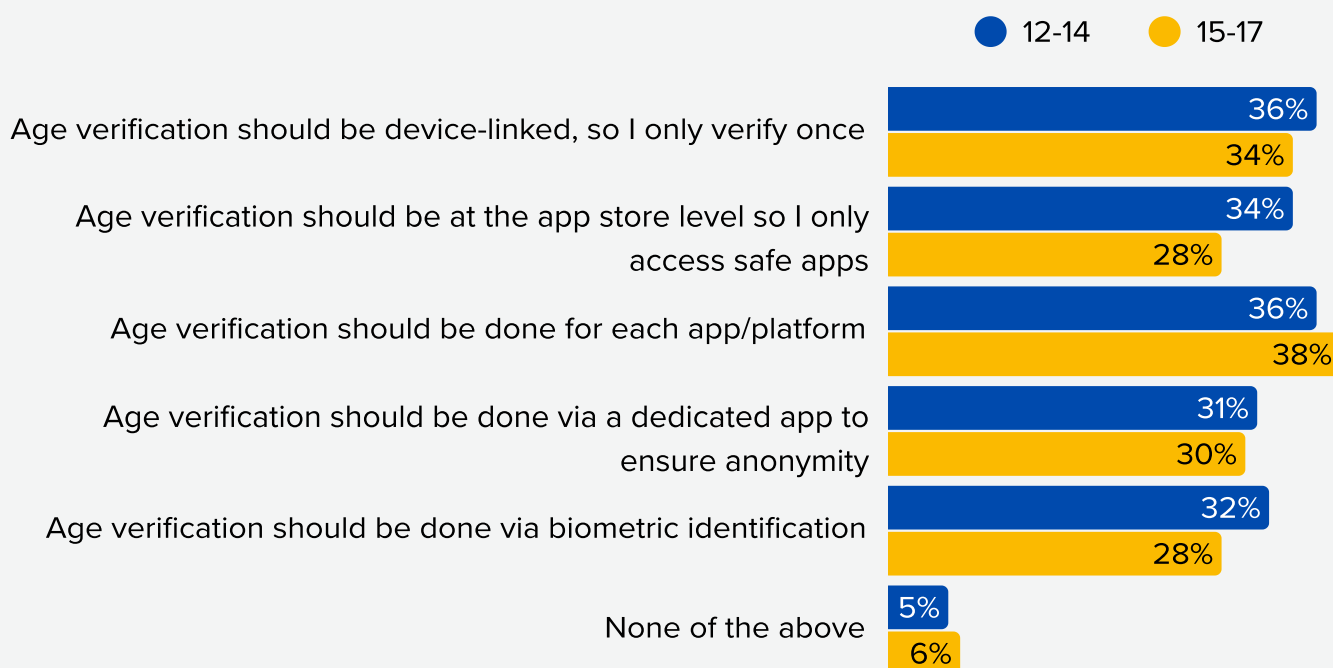
Video games should have a time limit for minors per day

Younger than me ● **My age** ●
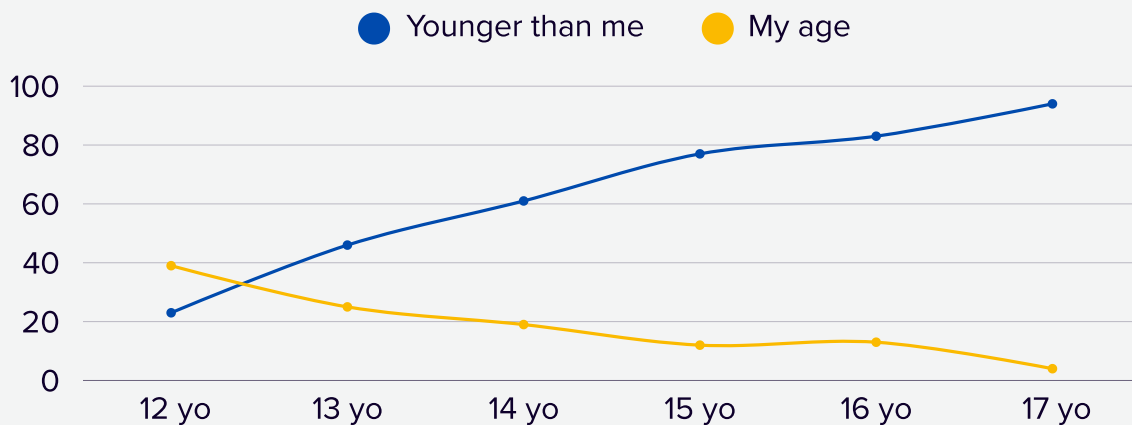
The same trend appears with regards to **minors having a personal smartphone**. When asked from what age this should be implemented 39% of 12-year-olds find their age appropriate, 23% believe also their younger peers should already have access, but 38% still think they should be older to have one of their own. As they grow, they feel more confident and less inclined to accept a ban.

How age verification should be done on the other hand, doesn't make much of a difference to them. By each app or platform level individually, by the app store, linked to the smartphone device, biometric identification or a dedicated app that preserves their anonymity? There seems to be **no outspoken preference**.

In your opinion, what are the best methods for age verification?

12-14 ● **15-17** ●

Method	12-14	15-17
Age verification should be device-linked, so I only verify once	36%	34%
Age verification should be at the app store level so I only access safe apps	34%	28%
Age verification should be done for each app/platform	36%	38%
Age verification should be done via a dedicated app to ensure anonymity	31%	30%
Age verification should be done via biometric identification	32%	28%
None of the above	5%	6%

Towards a digital world designed for minors:
10 take-aways

It's a (wonderful) digital life

For this generation of 12- to 17-year-olds the internet isn't optional - **it's the backdrop to their lives**. Young people value the internet for the opportunities it gives them to connect, explore, create, and learn in ways that shape who they are. Popular pastimes like music, gaming, and social media sit alongside more purposeful uses with nearly all minors searching for information. It's more than entertainment; it is also their gateway to new knowledge and skills and a practical tool to manage different parts of their life.

Social online/offline

Our teens do not just scroll, they also live dynamic offline lives. What's even more, despite popular beliefs, the number of online activities does not seem to negatively impact teenagers' offline behaviour. **More active teens** - those who take part in a wide variety of after-school activities - **also practice a wider range of online activities** and do it more frequently. Take social media for example: youngsters that meet more frequently with friends at the park or at home also engage more with social media and use multiple platforms. This connected generation is a dynamic one, constantly moving between real-life and digital worlds.

The 'dark side' of innovation

The online life of teens isn't a walk in the park but comes with a delicate balancing act between enjoying the innovation is has to offer and safeguarding their physical, emotional and economic integrity. The rapid uptake i.e. of Generative AI shows that minors are curious, adaptable, and open to new innovations. Unfortunately, the online environment also gives **leeway to real-life risks** like cyberbullying, hate speech, unsolicited explicit messages and fake news. At the same time, at least a part of minors experiences fear of missing out, impact on their school results and even anxiety.

Awake and savvy

In this battle for balance, teenagers showcase an interesting level of awareness together with a significant **"I can handle it"** attitude. Many are aware of the risks to their online behaviour and claim to be savvy enough to handle it - a level of confidence that goes up as they grow older. A growing interest in healthy digital habits is underpinned by efforts to limit their screen time and a strong appreciation for tools that effectively empower them to do so. Especially social media users seem to show a strong awareness and adopt a diverse toolbox of actions to protect themselves.

Not all teens are equal

The survey findings reveal that differences in gender, household finances or educational level also lead to differences in online behaviour. For example, compared to those living in a financial comfortable situation, the hours spend online tend to go up for minors living in less affluent households, while they are also less likely to try and limit their screen time. It shows that the **impact of money, gender or education** goes beyond real-life struggles; it has tentacles reaching deep into teens' online behaviour.

No appetite for manipulation

Teenagers might embrace digital life; they are less keen on digital manipulation. Young users are wary about the influence of algorithms, targeted ads and pop-ups on their thoughts, time spent online, and on their wallet. They want the freedom to enjoy relevant digital experiences, like without being unduly pressured by commercial content or manipulation. Although part of teenagers also see some value in algorithms or ads, above all they **want to be able to decide for themselves**. In short: a call for more control.

Struggling a social media ban

Social media and teens, the one goes with the other. So, it is not entirely illogical that, to protect young people from the real risks involved, one quickly ends up in a discussion about a ban or age restrictions. However, next to mapping bad online experiences, this survey laid bare that for many social media users - also the youngest of teenagers – it is not just a matter of entertainment but their way of connecting, accessing information, a practical tool, to even a defining factor in their friendship relations and identity. This raises the question whether by killing the bad we are not denying them access to the good? The survey findings equally revealed that teens start early and, especially the younger ones, feel sometimes the need to circumvent already existing age restrictions. They might say to see some usefulness in age restrictions, they tend to be less keen on it when it applies to them. Looking at all this together, it makes us wonder: **is a ban the most appropriate way forward?**

A call for safety-by-design

If you ask minors, they see more use in safety-by-design. Features like blurring inappropriate content or specific default settings for minors' accounts can count on strong support. Young people understand the risks, but also the benefits of the digital world. By introducing safety by design features for minors from the development stage, we can ensure they do not lose out on access to the benefits and new innovations. Teenagers' message is clear: first **it is up to platforms and apps to keep minors safe**.

A call for empowerment

Teens' call for safety-by-design goes together with a strong call for empowerment. This generation is one with agency. They want to navigate the digital world safely and they want to be empowered with the right tools to do so. This quest for accountability is already eflected by their uptake of tools to limit screen time. It is echoed by a call for control over what they get to see in their feed. And it is confirmed by strong support for new measures like dedicated support and report channels or "Think before you share" pop-ups. Rather than restricting their access, todays' **teenagers ask to be in charge.**

A call for agency

Above all, minors send us a big cry-out for them to be heard. They understand the risks and feel more should be done, but they are equally adamant that any solution must be nuanced to respect the positives that come from being online: a comprehensive combination of smart regulation, platform responsibility, parental support, youth empowerment and youth engagement. In short: it should be **"minor-proof"**. Build for minors, together with minors. We've spent too long making assumptions about what teenagers need, pretending to know best. We asked them. Now it's time to listen and implement.

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Methodology

The research, conducted across Belgium, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Spain from 3rd – 9th July 2025, reflects the voices of teenagers aged 12 to 17. Through an online questionnaire 3.351 valid answers were collected (around 700 per country). Parents of teens in this age range were invited to provide consent, and asked to let their child answer the questions alone, avoiding any adult supervision. Respondents were selected based on pre-defined interlocked quotas and the samples were a-posteriori weighted to reflect the national distributions in terms of gender, age, and geographical area.

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