

Life online – through children’s eyes

- Findings from the Children’s Advisory Panel

March 2017



The cover page illustrates CAPNet and is based on ideas presented by children participating in the CAP initiative.

The ideas generated by the CAP-kids demonstrate their creativity and wild optimism in the opportunities afforded by technology – from emotion-reading robots and mirrors, time-machines and teleportation devices, to “skill pills” that provide you with an instant ability to adopt a new skill and DNA-changing technology that enables you to experience living in different cultures as a minority representative.

Many of the co-created ideas also dealt with more down-to-earth topics, such as finding friends with similar interests, boosting self-esteem and self-confidence, attacking loneliness or other social problems, sharing ideas about what to do and learning new hobbies and pastimes.

Executive summary

The rapid development of technology and communications networks in recent years has made it possible for young people to be online all day, every day. The majority of teenagers have smartphones that enable constant mobile connectivity, and they tend to have their phone at arm's reach all day long, even during the night. It is the last thing they see when they go to sleep and the first thing they see when they wake up. It has become an essential part of their lives.

The Children's Advisory Panel (CAP) was created to better understand children's own perspectives of online and digital aspects of life by listening to them through qualitative co-creative methods. CAP is an initiative by Telia Company in collaboration with child rights organizations and schools in seven countries across the Nordics and Baltics. The aim of the CAP initiative is to further develop Telia's approach to children's rights as users of communications technology and to contribute to the ICT industry's and society's **understanding of children as online citizens**.

More than 700 children in the 6th and 9th grades have participated in the project — referred to throughout the report as CAP-kids — by describing and discussing the opportunities and benefits of life online. The key findings were remarkably similar across all countries, highlighting the true borderless nature of the Internet.

CAP-kids embrace the opportunities of their life online. It is their go-to channel for searching for information, social engagements and communication as well as entertainment and passing time. Management of daily practicalities such as timetables and schedules, hobbies, school, homework and other obligations as well as making small purchases are also benefits enabled by mobile online access. Maintaining friendships and making new ones is also seen as a huge opportunity by the CAP-kids. Overall, being online creates feelings of fun, freedom, courage and friendship.

CAP-kids show a high degree of maturity and resilience in their online presence. This applies to both age groups. They are aware that they should be concerned about the reliability and trustworthiness of online content and they have different strategies to tackle these concerns. They express a sincere need for applications or services that could help them in the difficult task of separating the truth from false information. Further, **CAP-kids care about their own and others' online identities**. They are very particular about how their identities are composed and portrayed, at the same time being aware that others' online identities are not always truthful either. When it comes to behavior online, children refer to an **established unwritten common code of conduct**, common to all Nordic and Baltic countries, that is (largely) invisible to adults. It is an intricate and detailed code that CAP-kids refer to and apply especially in the social media context, regardless of age or gender.

CAP-kids need good connectivity for social inclusion. Using social media to share small moments and experiences throughout the day — often in real-time to the extent that it becomes a part of real life — calls for good online connectivity. Online gaming requires fast connections to stay in the game and the gaming team. On the other hand, poor connectivity can trigger frustration for disrupting the online activities and losing contact with friends.

Despite their high online independence, **CAP-kids still expect presence and guidance from adults**, however, from a distance. The adults' role is to take care of the infrastructure and administration but hold back in other participation. Their role, according to CAP-kids, is to create an organized, functional and safe online environment but remain invisible.