NOMINET SOCIAL IMPACT | DIGITAL YOUTH INDEX

32% OF 17-19 YEAR OLDS SAY THE INTERNET HAS A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MORE CONNECTED, YET FEELING MORE ISOLATED - WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

INSIGHT

Digital access creates opportunities for connection but, at the same time, can exacerbate feelings of isolation. 55% of young people say they have been spending more time online due to the pandemic (equivalent of 8 million young people). 17 – 19-year-olds were especially likely to have spent more time online due to COVID-19. 68% of this age group said they spent more time online while half (49%) said they felt isolated from others, and 59% worried about others having fun without them.

The qualitative research illustrates how social exclusion can seep into online gaming and messaging too; young people can become upset if their virtual avatars are treated unkindly, when they are excluded from group activities, removed from group chats, or are subjected to online bullying.

Our focus groups with parents and professionals working with young people highlighted some of the concerns adults have about young people becoming too dependent on online interactions, and the risk of this impacting how often they have face-to-face interactions in real life.

Overall, 17% of young people say their use of the internet and digital devices has a negative impact on their mental health compared with 44% who say it has a positive impact. At the same time, 44% of young people feel isolated from others. This is particularly apparent in young adults, where there are higher feelings of isolation. Around half feel isolated and a quarter that their use of technology and the internet is negatively impacting their mental health.
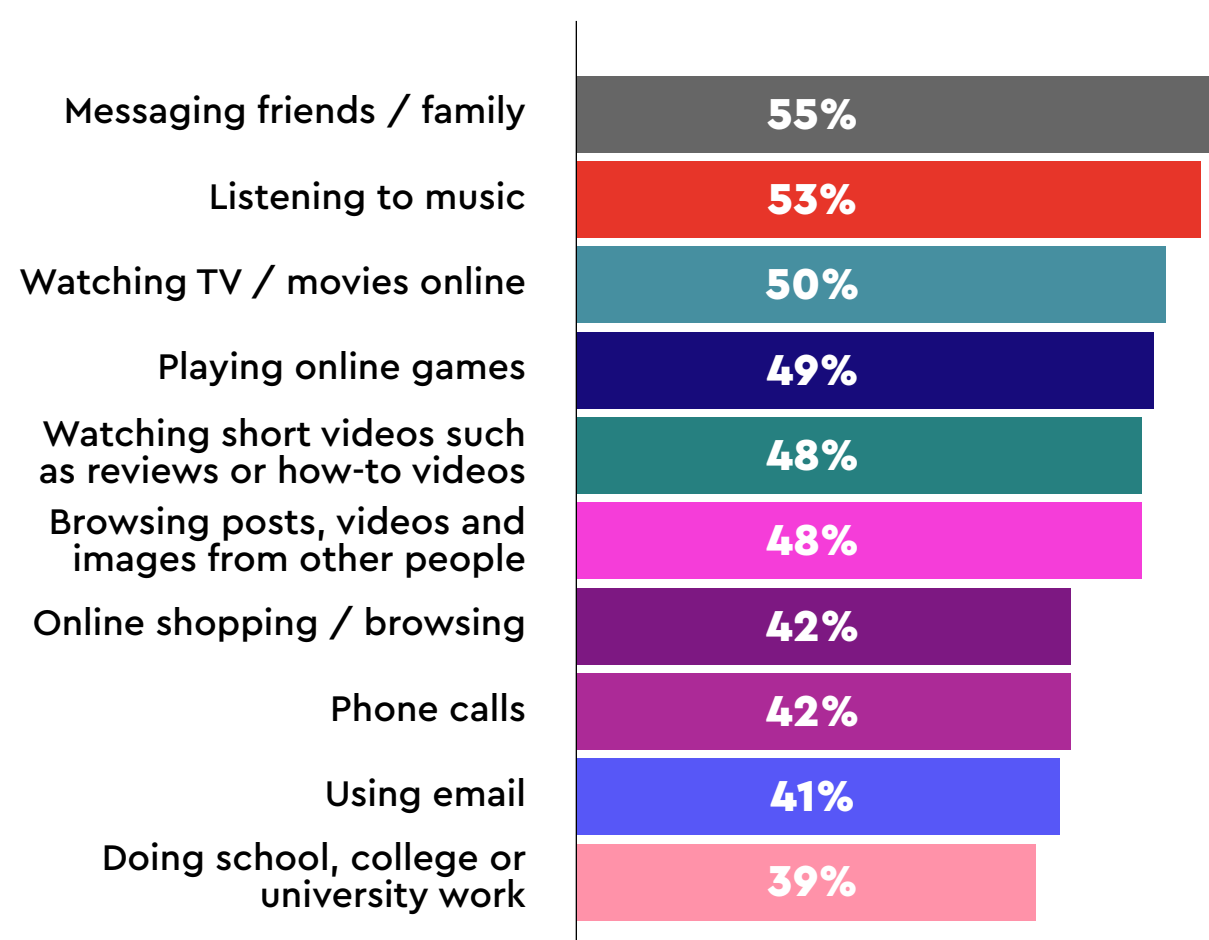
WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Chatting to friends, playing games, watching TV, listening to music, and shopping make going online important for wellbeing, especially when we can't leave home. And yet, 17-19-year-olds tell us the internet has had a negative impact on their mental health. We know a large part of this is finding a healthy balance with how we spend quality time online, build resilience to protect ourselves and knowing when to switch off.
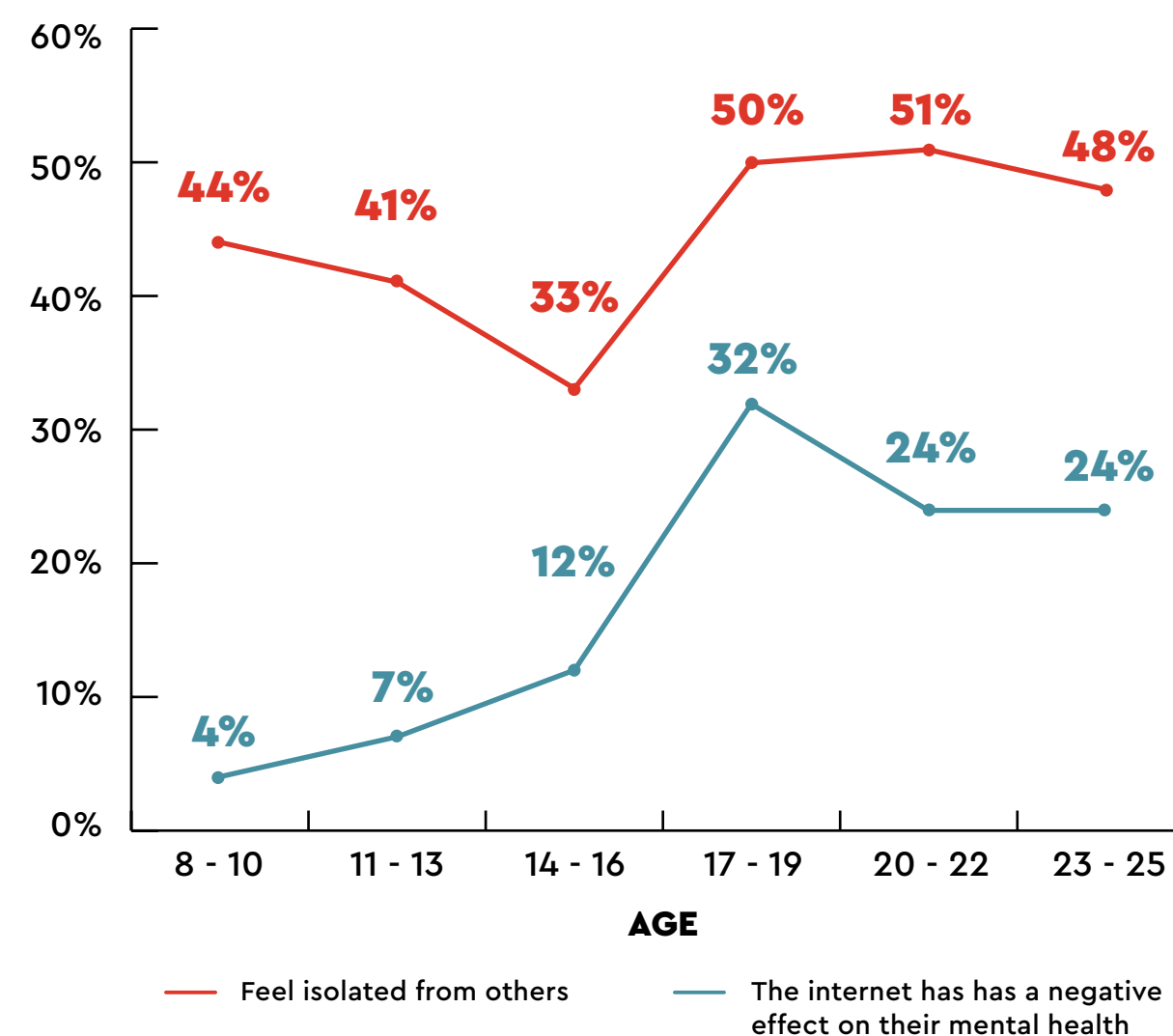
IMPLICATIONS

- How are our digital connections affecting our in-person relationships and attitudes towards who we trust?

- How can we intentionally design online interactions to build positive social connection?

- What's behind perceptions of communicating online as feeling more anonymous?

- How should provision or policy for EdTech incorporate factors of wellbeing – such as should watching a film on your school laptop be accepted in your usage policy?

WHAT DO YOU TYPICALLY SPEND TIME USING YOUR DEVICES FOR?

Activity	Percentage
Messaging friends / family	55%
Listening to music	53%
Watching TV / movies online	50%
Playing online games	49%
Watching short videos such as reviews or how-to videos	48%
Browsing posts, videos and images from other people	48%
Online shopping / browsing	42%
Phone calls	42%
Using email	41%
Doing school, college or university work	39%

HOW DOES YOUR USE OF THE INTERNET AND DIGITAL DEVICES IMPACT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

AGE	Feel isolated from others	The internet has a negative effect on their mental health
8 - 10	44%	4%
11 - 13	41%	7%
14 - 16	33%	12%
17 - 19	50%	32%
20 - 22	51%	24%
23 - 25	48%	24%

— Feel isolated from others
— The internet has has a negative effect on their mental health

> *[I feel sad] when [my brother] leaves me out or my friends kill me on Fortnite [and] when the internet doesn't work or when I have a tech ban. [I worry about] people being nasty to me on Fortnite. [My brother's] friend was mean to me so mom banned me from playing with him.*

MALE, 10