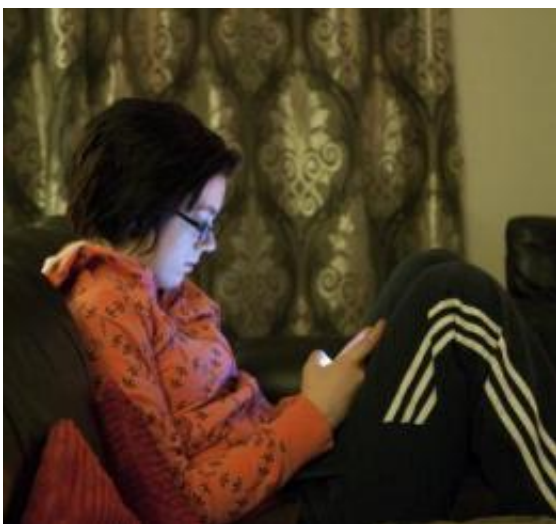


Proposals to record the age of youngsters when buying mobile phones

November 20 2012



Mobiles have increased internet access for minors. Credit: Greg Clarke

Mobile telephone operators should verify the age of children and youngsters when they access multimedia services by having a record of users' dates of birth. This is one of the recommendations in a report by researchers from the Polytechnic University of Valencia (Spain), that also suggest content classifications for mobiles by age, like in the case of video games.

"Verification of age upon access to mobile phone services is not effective because the child can also falsify their age by checking a different box," as explained to SINC by María de Miguel Molina,

lecturer at the Polytechnic University of Valencia.

"However, operators could be made aware of the age of their young users if their parents were to disclose such information when purchasing a mobile phone for their child. This information could then be registered," adds the researcher, who headed the study on [mobile services](#) aimed at children in Spain.

Published in the '*Quality & Quantity*' journal, the report outlines that if this measure were adopted, access to adult sites or those not suitable for minors could be filtered or blocked. This would mean common regulations for operators.

The majority of companies currently operating in Spain have signed the self-regulation code of the Spanish Mobile Operators Association, AESAM, which supports "responsible access" to content. Even so, according to the study this does not suffice and it should be more specific when making reference to children.

The researchers have also recommended the creation of a classification scheme according to user age and service theme like the one currently in place for video games: the Pan European Game Information (PEGI), which recommends games for children and youngsters of 3, 7, 12, 16 and over 18 years.

Recommendations to the Government

The study was conducted using surveys sent to companies, government agencies and child protection associations. Its results suggest that the Spanish Government needs to work with families and schools to promote awareness campaigns on proper [mobile phone](#) usage.

In addition, emphasis was placed on the need to reach an agreement with

operators so that they can get the opinion of [parents](#) and incorporate filtering services. These would include access and download bans on pornographic photographs and videos, SMS and MMS sending restrictions, internet purchasing restrictions and bans on participation in contests and competitions.

"Up until now we thought we could control youngsters' access to the internet on the household desktop by locating it in a visible place, for example, and ensuring that children use the internet properly. But, smartphones have opened up new doors," warns De Miguel, who also highlights the recent advance of mobile applications (apps) and, above all, the use of social networks like Tuenti and Facebook amongst minors.

"One of the main problems is that children under the [age](#) of 14 can easily gain access despite it being prohibited under Spanish legislation," outlines the researcher. "As a result, the only available resource would be the electronic ID card, but its short term implementation is a long way away."

In any case, if the youngster is older than 14 and provides their real identity, "the social network is then both legally and socially responsible to offer more than enough protection so that the user can enjoy the site without problems."

The researchers are now appealing to social networks to implement measures such as closed profiles by default, the use of passwords and clearer information, as well as teaching [youngsters](#) how to use social networking sites and protect their privacy.

More information: María De-Miguel-Molina, Mónica Martínez-Gómez, Blanca De-Miguel-Molina, Gabriela Ribes-Giner. "A quantitative study on mobile services aimed at children and self-regulation in Spain". *Quality & Quantity* 46 (6): 1795-1806, October

2012.

Provided by Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT)

Citation: Proposals to record the age of youngsters when buying mobile phones (2012, November 20) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-11-age-youngsters-mobile.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.