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5 trends that will impact the kids digital landscape in 2021

What were 2020's biggest trends?

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—01

Covid-19 accelerated the adoption of edtech tools.

As schools around the world closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, educational technology tools became critical to fostering virtual learning environments.

—02

Screen time shifted – from entertainment to everything.

Technology provided a source of connection for kids and families alike during a time of physical distance. Devices became the location for everything from shopping to social interactions.

—03

With more kids online than ever before, kidtech was on the rise.

Half of all American children aged 9-12 are on Roblox. As people – from parents and regulators to children themselves – continued to raise online safety and privacy concerns, kidtech solutions provided a safe space to connect, engage, and consume content.

—04

Family tools offered greater control over kids' online activity.

From monitoring and limiting screen time to setting restrictions on content and in-app purchases, family tools provided relief to busy parents who balanced working from home while managing their children's increased device usage.

—05

Movies were released direct-to-home, prompting a new normal in streaming.

The successful digital release of "Trolls World Tour", due to movie theater closures amid the pandemic, indicated a new shift: on-demand streaming has become central to the family film industry.

What trends will shape the kids digital landscape in 2021?

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Children's digital privacy laws will continue to shift focus towards advertisers and their agencies

Historically, children's digital privacy laws placed liability only on self-identified kids' publishers. However, as new laws like the Age Appropriate Design Code widen the liability threshold, all stakeholders in the digital media value chain are under scrutiny.

2021 will see increased investigation (both from regulatory bodies and through civil actions) of what goes on behind the screen, looking at agencies, adtech tools, and engagement platforms which are facilitating the collection of children's personal data.

In 2020, WPP became the first major advertising agency to take a public stance about digital privacy and safety for kids, with others sure to follow in the year ahead.

TAKE ACTION:

You are responsible for any data collection that happens on your site or digital service, or by your brand – even if managed by a third party. Audit your agency partners to ensure they are complying with kids digital privacy laws.

Our third-party compliance checklist will help you better understand what data your partners are collecting and how they are using it: download it here.
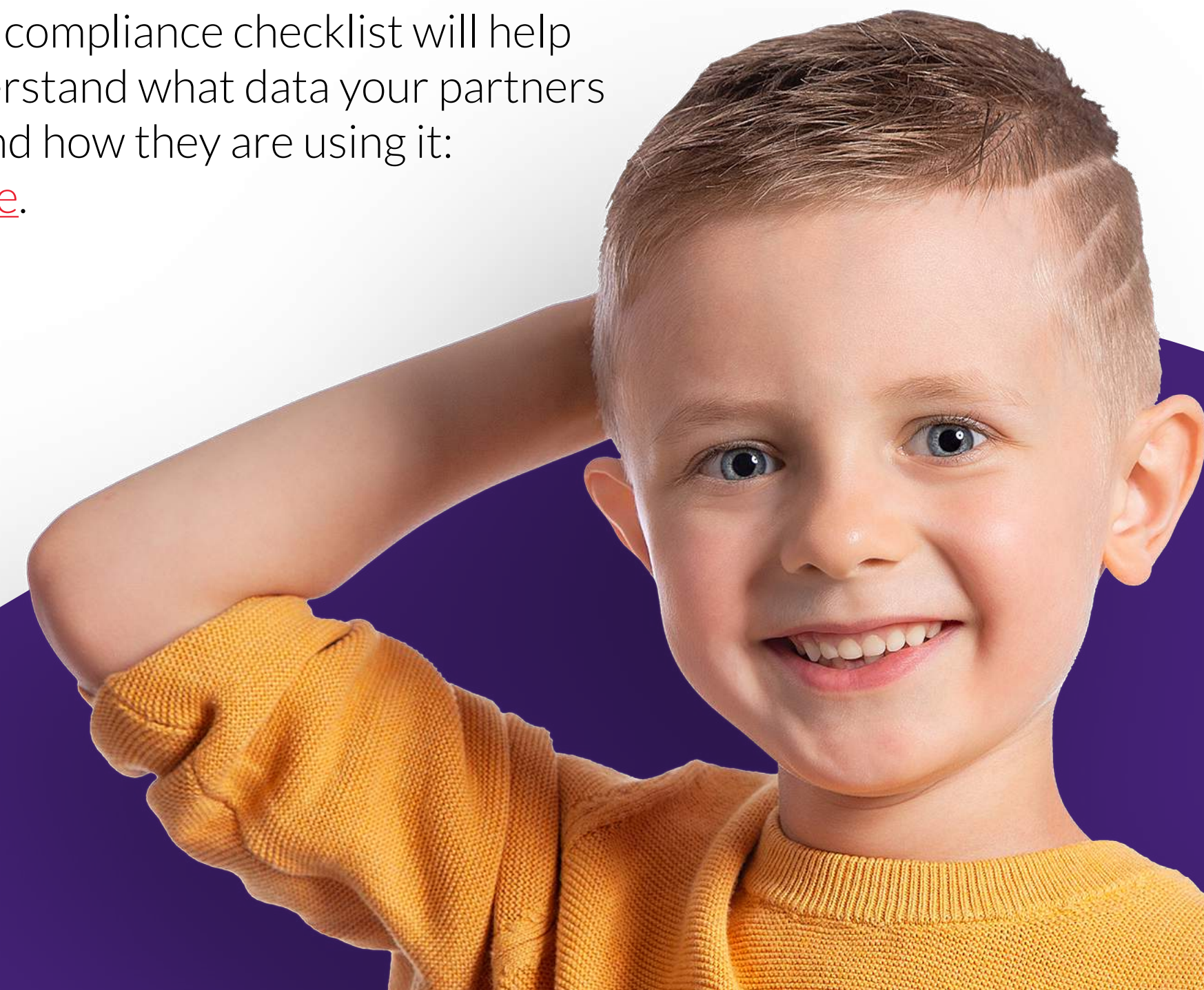
Young Teens will emerge as the next defined audience group

In the mid-nineties, 'Tweens' (ages 10-12) became a recognized subset, different from children and teenagers. Today, youth between the ages of 13 and 16 are emerging from the overall teenager category as a distinct and influential new cohort: Young Teens.

The combination of early device adoption and Covid impact has distinguished Young Teens from their older counterparts. This audience may be interested in being treated as adults, but Young Teens have different passion points, levels of maturity, and complex content consumption patterns. When we consider the differences between a 13-year-old and an 18-year-old, it becomes apparent why taking a broader approach to reaching Young Teens is ineffective.

2021 will see a far more sophisticated understanding of the overall youth market, with Young Teens categorized independently from older teens. The all-inclusive teenage audience will be a notion of the past, with brand communications becoming more focused and tailored to narrower segments.

TAKE ACTION:

Young Teens are an audience that cannot be ignored. Engaging teenagers as a whole, in hopes that Young Teen audiences will follow, fails to recognize their unique preferences and behaviors. Beyond this, the changing scope of digital privacy laws demands that under-16 audiences be treated differently than their older teenage counterparts.

Download our report for more insights about this distinct and powerful audience.

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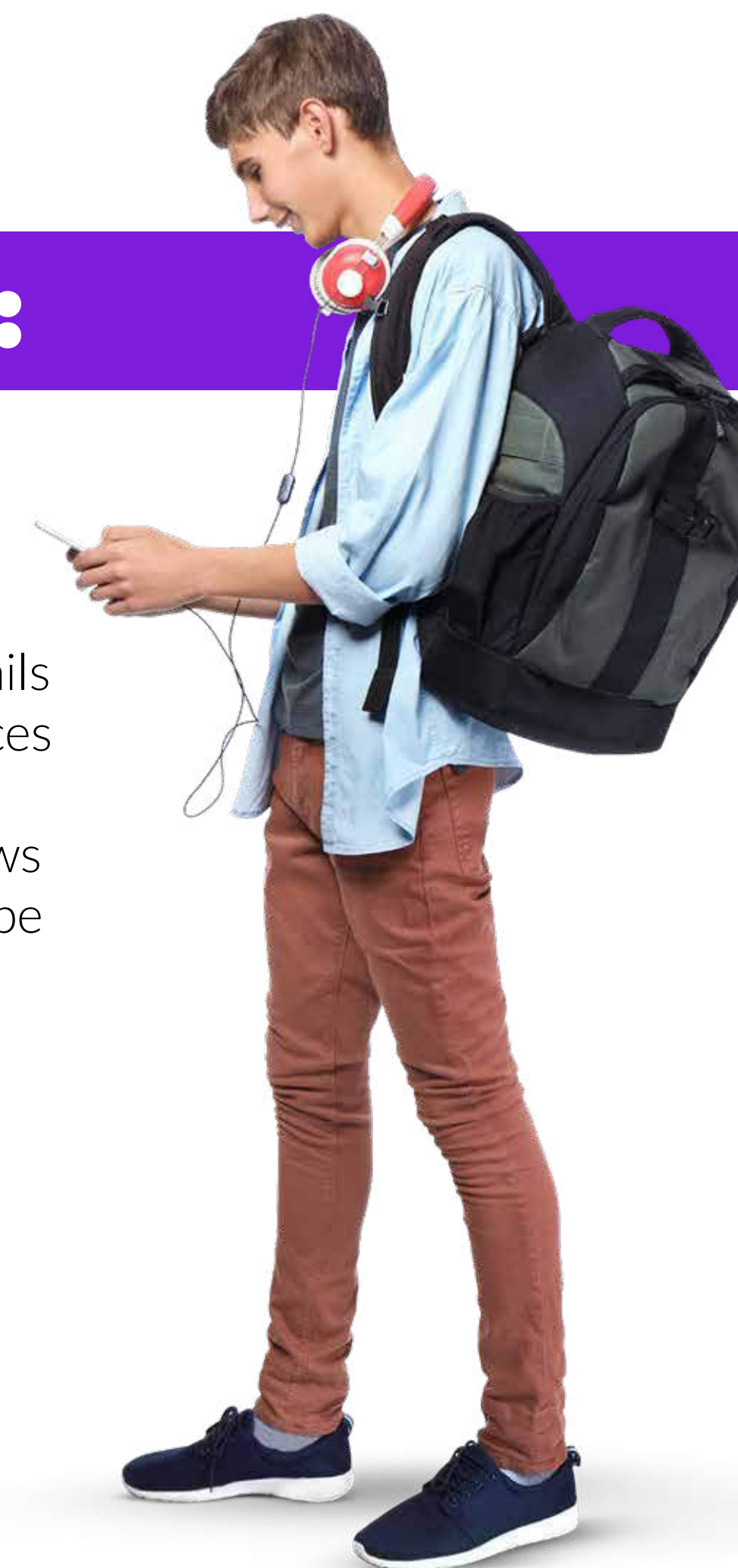
Verifiable Parental Consent (VPC) will become the next two-factor authentication

Over the past few years, two-factor authentication has become an online security staple. Driven by the explosion in kids' screen time caused by Covid-19, digital service providers have been racing to add family support and parent tools to their offerings. As a result of this, we expect that Verifiable Parental Consent (VPC) will soon follow in its footsteps as the next major buzzword in online security.

Beyond safeguarding providers against violations of digital privacy laws, integrating consent management processes may generate additional benefits, such as an increased user base, as parents seek out safer options for their children and kids seek out safer online communities to participate in. Keeping kids' safety in mind when designing digital experiences could also increase in-platform spend, with 84% of parents saying they would allow their kids to spend money on apps or games that offer a safer experience.

TAKE ACTION:

VPC is a default requirement to ensure safety and compliance. Digital service providers – even those with mixed audiences – must add in VPC methods to support the inevitable influx of under-16 users. Kidtech solutions can help digital service providers obtain VPC while minimizing user friction.

What is VPC?

Apps and games that need to collect personally identifiable information (PII) from kids in order to function require that parents give permission for their children's data to be legitimately used. Common in-app features powered by PII include push notifications, in-game purchasing, gameplay powered by geo-location, and social networking. Given the sensitive nature of this information, this process is essential to ensure safety and compliance with data privacy laws, including COPPA and GDPR-K. Doubling as both a legal and supervisory function, VPC is the mechanism that allows parental consent to be obtained.

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Non-toxic will become one of the most important brand safety descriptions

It's not just parents and regulators that are concerned about children's online safety. From social platforms to gaming environments, kids crave safe online communities. In the US, 88% of kids* prefer to use social media apps that are meant to be used by kids only.

Younger kids, ages 8-9, are most concerned about becoming exposed to inappropriate content. This age group worries about seeing something bad or scary online, and will often self-regulate online activity by only connecting with friends in gaming environments and sticking to known YouTubers as much as possible.

And digital safety has never been more critical. Digital learning, increased free time, and the need for distanced connectivity has pushed more kids online during the pandemic. Add to the mix parents who struggle to monitor online activity, many of whom are now juggling working from home without childcare support, and you have a volatile situation.

Watch for brands and agencies to invest in (and speak publicly about) non-toxic community and engagement tools in 2021.

"**There is too much bullying in the gaming world**, we're trying to escape all that when we play."

– Gamer, age 12

TAKE ACTION:

Platforms that aren't purpose-built for kids do not prioritize kid-safety. Brands must take responsibility for the safety of their online communities by working with youth specialists. Brands and content owners should offer non-toxic options for their fans and audiences to safeguard their reputation and build trust.

*Research conducted by Sherbert Research on behalf of SuperAwesome in the UK and US, n=600 August 2020

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Brands will create metaverse studios to design cross-platform experiences

Popular games have already moved away from reliance on gameplay itself and towards other ways to consume content, whether in video, music, or written format. Not every kid in the gaming ecosystem is a gamer and, likewise, gaming content exists beyond the gaming ecosystem. Kids turn to social video platforms to watch gaming videos created by influencers and create their own social content around gaming characters and themes.

In response to this shift, we expect that 2021 will be the year that brands start to create metaverse studios: in-house teams focused on integrating the brand into multiple digital worlds, including implementing games engagement strategies. Non-gaming brands will build experiences that can be played across games, and games will continue to serve as sandbox tools which kids will use, repurpose, and play with their own rules – not necessarily how they were originally designed.

TAKE ACTION:

Brands must focus on integrating their brand into the online worlds kids are creating and participating in across different platforms. Successful brands will consider the entire digital ecosystem, providing both active and passive ways for kids to engage with the content they create.

What is the metaverse?

The metaverse is a universe of shared virtual worlds, in which users can interact with a computer-generated environment and other users. The term is often linked to gaming environments, but its breadth spans across a variety of virtual experiences, from playing games, to watching concerts, to interacting with other users and beyond.

Get ahead in the kids landscape in 2021

Do

✅ Audit your partners to ensure they are experts on the latest kids digital privacy laws, as relevant to your market.

✅ Consider your approach to Young Teens, learning more about their distinct needs, interests, and communication preferences.

✅ Take responsibility for ensuring your online communities are safe and non-toxic.

✅ Leverage the metaverse to integrate your brand across a variety of digital platforms, offering exciting ways for kids to engage with your content both actively and passively.

✅ Add in VPC methods to support the inevitable influx of under-16 users, ensuring safety and compliance.

Don't

❌ Assume that you are compliant because you're working with a third-party or that you don't need to worry about brand safety if you aren't a household name.

❌ Categorize Young Teens together with their younger or older counterparts – an aspirational approach won't work with this cohort.

❌ Rely on platforms to prioritize kid-safety.

❌ Create content that kids can't interact with in different and engaging ways. Expecting kids to seek out this content instead of making your brand present where kids are most engaged is a missed opportunity.

❌ Ignore the fact that kids are on your platform – you could face legal consequences.

SuperAwesome powers under-16 safe digital engagement for hundreds of companies around the world. Every month our kidtech enables over 12 billion transactions across thousands of kids, Young Teens, and family apps and digital services.

We are the largest kidtech team in the world dedicated to building a safer internet for the next generation.

Things are changing quickly. We can help you be **agile** and **flexible** in your planning.

Contact us at enquiries@SuperAwesome.com

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