

Research Report of Web Contents on Global Platforms Including Smartphones Aimed at Children in Japan

Mar. 2021

Youth Content Research Society
(Mobile Content Forum)

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1. About the Youth Content Research Society

1-1. Purpose of establishment and operation policy

In our increasingly IT-centric society, the use of global standard smartphones and other electronic devices is becoming more and more widespread. These electronic devices account for a high percentage of the delivery of the content services that young people use on a daily basis. Given this, it is becoming a prerequisite to use the global standard system attached to OSs, which are global platforms, for filtering and other youth protection systems. These factors have moved us to establish this research society to carry out activities to contribute to the sound development of youth in Japan.

The effective use of global standard technology is crucial to expanding the future potential of our children. At the same time, for young people to develop soundly, they need to be exposed to diverse content suitable for their age while being protected from illegal and harmful content so they can grow in knowledge and develop in sensitivity through Japan's complex and unique culture. From the standpoint of this belief and based on universal global platforms, the Youth Content Research Society will engage in activities to create a universal scheme that reflects individual cultures. Instead of defining detailed rules, we will consider specific activities based on the principles we have clarified that constitute the grounds therefor.

1-2. Scope of activities in this project

As the scope of activities in this project, our aim was to select websites for a Recommendation List that suit Japan's culture and usage circumstances based on the premise of use of the Allowed Websites Only option under Screen Time, which is an iOS function for youth protection, or other equivalent systems. (The list currently contains child-oriented websites used in English-speaking areas around the world.)

The Recommendation List that we offer in this project is intended for children who are new to smartphones and who do not yet have sufficient IT literacy. We hope that this will ultimately help them to gain the competence to freely expand their fields of activity by proactively utilizing content independently and responsibly while utilizing the optimal filtering function according to their age.

2. Current state of youth protection systems in Japan

The following systems are basically provided by OS and mobile phone operators as youth protection systems for global standard smartphones and other devices.

2-1. iOS Screen Time

Screen Time is an iOS feature that lets you see how you spend your time on your iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch, as well as set up limits on content, privacy, and more. It can also be used as a parental control by setting a Screen Time passcode. Screen Time allows parents to set downtime, or time during which their children do not use the device, as well as the length of time that specific apps are open, how long their children spend on the phone talking with individual contacts, and content restriction features that limit apps and charges based on ratings and that limit inappropriate web content.

▼ Web content limits are divided into the following three categories.

- Unrestricted Access
- Limit Adult Websites
- Allowed Websites Only

In addition to Screen Time, iOS also offers Family Sharing, which lets parents set up family accounts and see and set the screen time of their family members right from their own devices. Family Sharing also alerts parents when their children attempt to download apps from the App Store so that they can approve or decline the download.

2-2. Android Family Link

Family Link, which is a parental control for Android devices, allows parents to control their children's use of devices from their own devices. With this function, parents can set the span of time during which their children are allowed to use the device and also control how they use apps by receiving alerts when their children attempt to make purchases from apps or download apps from the Google Play Store so they can approve or decline the purchase/download. This feature also allows parents to check the location of their children.

2-3. Filtering offered by mobile phone carriers

The Act on Development of an Environment that Provides Safe and Secure Internet Use for Young People requires young people to employ filtering when using the Internet on mobile phones in principle. In response to this act, mobile phone companies provide filtering services.

Mobile phone carriers offer smartphone filtering services through a dedicated app called Anshin Filter (*anshin* means “safety” in Japanese). The Android version consists of a dedicated web browser and app blocking features that block inappropriate content from being downloaded or viewed. The iPhone offers only a dedicated web browser that blocks the viewing of inappropriate websites. For app restriction, it utilizes Screen Time, which is equipped in iOS.

Further, the services offered vary depending on the mobile phone carrier, and a function to set the use time for an app is equipped as part of the filtering function while a service to perform filtering in response to accessed URLs is provided on cellular phone lines.

*MVNO and Rakuten Mobile have some differences in name and function.

*As other measures, security vendors and other parties also offer filtering apps.

3. Recommendation List selection

First, to select sites for the Recommendation List, we analyzed the global standard list for iOS Screen Time use and created a list of children’s sites to be the candidates for Japan’s Recommendation List. We moved forward with the creation of the candidate list with consideration for covering the categories included in the global standard list.

Table 1: Global standard list with Allowed Websites Only under iOS Screen Time

Website	Area	URL	Description
1.Apple---Start	Device information	www.apple.com	
2.Cbeebies(by BBC)	Media	https://global.cbeebies.com/	A BBC channel for children aged six and under.
3.Discovery Kids	Media (Minority)	https://www.discoverykidsplus.com/	A Spanish video channel for children. (Videos not viewable on the website. YouTube channel available.)
4.Disney	Entertainment	https://www.disney.co.jp/	Disney's website.
5.HowStuffWorks	Educational	https://www.howstuffworks.com/	Offers simple descriptions of various things, events, and phenomena of all types with illustrations and photos.
6.National Geographic - Kids	Educational	https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/	National Geographic for children. The content includes videos and games.
7.PBS Kids	Media (Public broadcasting)	https://pbskids.org/	PBS Kids is the website of the major American educational media brand that presents programs such as Sesame Street. The content includes videos, games, and apps.
8.Scholastic.com	Books	http://scholastic.asia/	A website that introduces and sells children’s books. (Scholastic publishes and sells general and educational books for children through book clubs, book fairs, and schools.)
9.Smithsonian Institution	Educational (Museum)	https://www.si.edu/	The website of the Smithsonian Institution.
10.Time for Kids	Media (Private broadcasting)	https://www.timeforkids.com/	Time Magazine’s website for children. (Also offers weekly magazines for elementary school children.)

Next, we analyzed the candidate list inductively. Informed by hearings of parties such as OS operators, the expertise of members of the Youth Content Research Society, and research results in associated fields, we formulated standards to serve as the principles for Recommendation List selection and created a checklist to evaluate individual websites. In creating the checklist, we referred to the approach of American Common Sense Media¹ and sought to clarify the basic way of thinking to serve as a guiding principle.

In the end, we evaluated the candidate websites using the checklist to create the Recommendation List for children in Japan to suit the selection criteria.

3-1. Selection criteria

- The site must be fair and sustainable.
- The site must not pose risks when used by children, and it must contribute to their sound growth.
- The site must have prospects for many users.
- The site must be able to help parents and their children select websites to view.

3-2. Website check items and basic concepts

Site check items

1. Operating entity
2. Website management condition
3. Users
4. Parent-child whitelist selection
5. Consideration for diverse values
6. Consideration for age, ability, and development
7. Consideration for learning
8. Consideration for child rights and human rights
9. Consideration for the sound growth and development of children
 - a. Pleasure and joy
 - b. Health impact
 - c. Crime and violence
 - d. Fear and danger
 - e. Sexual expressions
 - f. Commercialism
 - g. Communication

Operating entity

From the evergreen perspective, check if the entity is sufficient in stability, reliability, and performance as an operator. Confirm that the operator, as an organization, is not engaged in business that does not conform to laws and social customs. It is a risk factor if the entity has corporate policies or business practices that can adversely affect children. On the other hand, it is desirable for the operating entity to define social contributions as part of the organization's purpose and to have philosophy and values that children should learn from.

Website management condition

Check that the site is updated and managed appropriately. Check that there are no broken links and that the content is up to date. Also check conformity with the latest security policies, such as https procedures. It is desirable for the site to have interesting page design and content to engage children and make them want to use the site.

¹ For more information on the approach of Common Sense Media, see “6. Examples of overseas approaches: CSM ratings in the U.S.” in the Appendix.

Users

Check that the site is widely known and commonly used by many users as a children's site. It is desirable for the content to combine learning and entertainment in a way that makes the site enjoyable for children to use. In addition, as a specific check method, check whether the site is listed in the top search engine results by general keywords or in the results of social services.

Parent-child whitelist selection

Check that, in a scenario where parents and children are making whitelist selections of typical children's sites together, this site will seem similar to such sites or will remind them of such sites. It is desirable for the site to meet the needs of both parents and children.

Consideration for diverse values

Check that children can learn a wide variety of values and knowledge from various people, countries, histories, and cultures, and develop the abilities to embrace diversity and think together and coexist as well as respect and empathy for others and other such values. It is a negative factor if the content or composition is biased toward specific values or knowledge and does not account for diversity, which fosters respect and empathy for others. It is desirable for the site to offer a wide variety of values and knowledge and to take into account diversity, which fosters respect and empathy for others.

Consideration for age, ability, and development

Check that appropriate consideration is given to children's language ability and cognitive development—for example, their age and grade—and that the content and structure are easy for them to understand. It is a negative factor if the given content or structure is difficult for children to understand and therefore does not inspire interest or catch attention, due to a lack of consideration for their age, language ability, or cognitive development. It is desirable for the site to foster interest, emotional investment, and curiosity in children and to promote healthy physical and emotional development.

Consideration for learning

Check that the content is suitable for children (students) to learn and that it contributes to their sound development. It is desirable for the content to contribute to school education or to raise or expand children's fields of interest or emotional investment.

Consideration for child rights and human rights

Check that the content is intended to serve the best interests of children and that it does not constitute discrimination, exploitation, etc., and consider rights including privacy (whether it obtains unnecessary cookies or personal information, etc.).

Consideration for sound growth and development of children

[1] Pleasure and joy

Check that the site brings pleasure and joy to children's lives for their sound development. It is desirable for the content of pages intended to enhance creativity and thinking ability in children to be entertaining so as to motivate children to learn and thereby live happier lives.

[2] Health impact

Check whether the site includes information that could have an adverse effect on the health of children (e.g. drinking, smoking, drugs) or is designed to entice them to spend a lot of time online. It is a risk factor if the site includes information that could have an adverse effect on the health of children. It is desirable for the site to include content that promotes the health of children while giving due consideration to their mental and physical health and safety.

[3] Crime and violence

Check if the site includes expressions of crime and violence from the perspective of children. It is a risk factor if the site includes expressions related to crime and violence that are socially unacceptable or, even to the extent permitted, inappropriate for children. It is desirable for the site to use positive ideas and educational perspectives for any expressions related to crime and violence.

[4] Fear and danger

Check if the site includes expressions as to fear and danger from the perspective of children. It is a risk factor if the site includes expressions related to fear and danger that are socially unacceptable or, even to the extent permitted, inappropriate for children. It is desirable for the site to use positive ideas and educational perspectives for any expressions related to fear or danger.

[5] Sexual expressions

Check whether the site includes sexual expressions that are inappropriate for children. It is a risk factor if the site includes sexual expressions that are socially unacceptable or, even to the extent permitted, inappropriate for children. It is desirable for the site to use positive ideas and educational perspectives for any sexual expressions.

[6] Commercialism

Consider that the site should not stimulate the desire in children to purchase certain goods or services or foster an excessive sense of familiarity. It is desirable for the site to include suggestions that help parents and children select good content or information that demonstrates contributing to society.

[7] Communication

Check that the content and arrangements contribute to the effective use of online communication by children. It is a risk factor if the site allows communication with many unspecified people. It is desirable for the site to include content and arrangements that help young people in online communication (e.g. education and awareness content, communication with limited access depending on the respective development stages of young users).

4. Recommendation List

4-1. Recommendation List (Survey period: Mar. to Sep. 2020)

We selected websites for a Recommendation List that suit Japan's culture and usage circumstances based on the premise of use of the Allowed Websites Only option of iOS Screen Time or other equivalent systems.

Table 2: Recommendation List

Website	Area	Operating entity	URL
1.NHK for School	Media (Programs for schoolchildren)	NHK	https://www.nhk.or.jp/school/
2. Yahoo! Kids	General web portal	Yahoo	https://kids.yahoo.co.jp/
3. Kids@nifty	General web portal	nifty	https://kids.nifty.com/
4.YouTube Kids	Entertainment	Google	https://www.youtubekids.com/
5. Gakken Kids Net	Education (Company)	ONE PUBLISHING	https://kids.gakken.co.jp/
6. Disney Kids	Entertainment	Disney	https://kids.disney.co.jp/
7. Device information website	Device information	OS and mobile phone operators, terminal device manufacturers	(For iOS) https://www.apple.com/jp/
8. National Museum of Nature and Science	Educational (Museum)	National Museum of Nature and Science	https://www.kahaku.go.jp/
9.Scratch	Programming education	MIT ²	https://scratch.mit.edu/
10. International Library of Children's Literature, National Diet Library	Educational (libraries)	National Diet Library, Japan	https://www.kodomo.go.jp/
11. The U-Tunes ³ website for kids by the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science	Educational	JAXA	https://www.kids.isas.jaxa.jp/

² Abbreviation for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

³ Japanese nickname meaning friends who are interested in space

4-2. Evaluation of individual sites in the Recommendation List

This section evaluates the reasons for selection, what to know before use, challenges, and other information on the sites adopted as the Recommendation List.

Table 3. Evaluation of individual sites in the Recommendation List

Website	Evaluation
1.NHK for School	The operating entity and its operation are stable. The site allows children to learn in their own right according to their own interests and emotional investment, and offers content that is very rich in quality and quantity. For usability reasons, it is also possible to search by subject, grade, content, and other conditions. The site also tries to broaden the range of its usage. For example, its playlist function allows users to share programs and video clips with others. As NHK is a public broadcaster, the site provides information considering that it will be consumed by children, foreigners, the elderly, and other minorities, and also delivers rich content related to social issues. Due to the URL structure, be aware that browsing this website will also enable you to view nhk.or.jp.
2. Yahoo! Kids	As a general web portal for children, this site organizes a wide range of content. It is rich in learning content, including subject learning and programming, as well as links to other entertainment content by other companies that is popular with children. There are considerations to ensure safe and secure Internet usage by children. The site is also equipped with a search engine that can eliminate harmful information, and it provides rich information on online literacy and awareness so that parents and children can enjoy the Internet with peace of mind.
3. Kids@nifty	As a typical Japanese general web portal for children, this site provides up-to-date and diverse information in response to the curiosity and interests of children, including educational content and entertainment information. Its content is unique, positive, and fun, and much of it focuses on children's lives in Japan, their sense of values, and culture. Its interactive pages and consultation sections that use the autonomous and interactive features of the Internet are also popular. Children can use the site safely and securely by themselves because it has few links or collaborations with other commercial sites. On the other hand, its posting rules are not intended for use by children. Hopefully, further efforts will be made to allow children to read and understand applicable laws and rules for themselves.
4.You Tube Kids	This site maintains its own unique safety measures to allow families to enjoy abundant educational and entertainment videos with peace of mind. It is commendable that it has implemented parental control functions, for not only selection of posts, for example, but also setting the age of child viewers to eliminate the risk of viewing harmful information. It is also designed to allow parents to check their children's viewing history and control (report) any video. Considering that children will have more opportunities to view posted videos as they grow up, this site is suitable as an initial stage because it features a video lineup that fosters imagination and creativity in children. However, since there are no restrictions on individual video content, it is not possible to eliminate 100% of images and words that are inappropriate for children even if parental control is used, so it is desirable for small children to watch videos together with their parents.
5. Gakken Kids Net	This site has an abundance of content for children. One unique feature is its emphasis on connections with the real world, such as various plant tours and job

	information that show the diversity of industries in Japan. Although there are commercial elements, it is commendable that the site does not directly solicit viewers to purchase its own products and services, but rather allows companies and industries to demonstrate their appeal as a form of CSR.
6. Disney Kids	Children can have a lot of fun with this site, which is full of Disney stories, character videos, and games that children can enjoy with a great deal of interest and emotional investment. On the other hand, parents need to be wary of commercialism as the site consists entirely of Disney content and includes Disney ads for pay-TV services.
7. Device information website	This site provides the required information on the devices used by children.
8. National Museum of Nature and Science	In comparison with the websites of other museums in Japan, this site is rich in VR content and other content that fosters interest in science and in the museum. Keep in mind that there is not necessarily much content for children, and it is difficult to say that just looking at the site will inspire interest in children. Also, the site uses Flash, necessitating technological updates.
9. Scratch	Programming is a field of great interest not only for children but also for parents, and Japanese elementary schools began to teach it in 2020. Scratch is a learning site that uses a visual programming language to learn. In addition to this primary function, it also thoroughly maintains tutorials, parental messaging, and custom guidelines and filtering. The site is designed to allow users to share projects, which benefits children by giving them higher motivation. Projects are posted worldwide, and English is the main language.
10. International Library of Children's Literature, National Diet Library	As a national library specialized in children's books, this site presents the latest news and events related to children and books in Japan and overseas. While the homepage is intended for adults and families, the children's content links directly to the Kids' Page of the National Diet Library, where children can enjoy learning about library knowledge and culture, and use the Children's OPAC to find children's books that interest them. On the other hand, the site's creative and interactive communication activities are limited because there is little variation in content for children, and the structure and arrangement are simple and lack elements of entertainment. Children can use the site safely and securely alone, but it is expected that children who use the site together with their parents can learn more deeply and discover new things.
11. The U-Tunes website for kids by the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science	It is great that the site is designed to draw children's attention with content about the universe, including paper crafts and interviews with JAXA workers. Keep in mind that much of the content is still image and text-based, and that functions such as moving images and interactivity are not utilized as online content, which makes the site somewhat less attractive.

5. Comments on children's sites in Japan

5-1. Significance of selection for the Recommendation List

It is significant to select sites that are safe for children who are growing up in a digital environment where the use of technology is a standard prerequisite. In this project, the list was created from the perspective of allowing parents and children to select sites that can be used by younger children in particular. The criteria for selecting such sites are described in another chapter. This section describes our findings during the course of this project as we selected the sites from the viewpoint of helping children in Japan.

5-2. Challenges for Japan's websites

(1) It cannot be said that all children's sites are rich.

While some sites are rich in both quality and quantity for children, there is a big gap with other sites. For example, even when children's sites are available, they may not be very enthusiastic about enrichment. The following trends are observed with these sites. Websites operated by public institutions are particularly susceptible to this, which is regrettable from the viewpoint of deepening children's understanding of their operations.

[1] Sparse information

It is not unusual for only some of the information contained in the original site to be set apart for use by children. We understand that it is certainly difficult to determine how much information to provide for children, but if a site has little information, you cannot expect children to visit repeatedly.

[2] Not arranged for children

For example, some operators create a site for children with some information set apart by simply transferring the original text and/or adding *furigana* (a Japanese pronunciation guide). While we believe that such considerations can at least help children to understand the content, it is hard to say that such sites are conscious of how they can inspire interest in children, and although they have made efforts to prepare a site for children, they probably cannot have high hopes for children to visit.

[3] Not up to date

There are also some examples of sites that were created for children but are not updated frequently enough. The advantage of the Internet is that the latest information is always available, so if a site is not updated, it is hard to say that it is utilizing this advantage. Also, if a site is not updated, only one visit will suffice and you cannot expect children to visit repeatedly.

(2) Not many sites offer content that will inspire children to take interest in Japan's culture, history, or traditions. Since the Recommendation List collects sites intended for children in Japan, it is desirable for it to include sites that can teach them about the country's culture, history, and traditions, but unfortunately, such sites are scarce.

In particular, museums should consider actively communicating the value of their collections. For the sake of preserving cultural heritage, it will be important to have more children who are interested in such cultural information online.

(3) There are few sites where children can enjoy themselves with peace of mind.

Despite Japan's global reputation for entertainment, it has few sites that offer children safe access to the country's entertainment content. As mentioned in (1) above, one of the reasons for this may be that little effort seems to have been put into creating content for children, but even when great efforts have been made, some sites have other problems, including a great deal of commercialism in the form of solicitation for goods or services. Such sites cannot be considered safe for children, whose judgment is not yet very mature. We understand that a certain degree of commercialism will accompany content provided by companies and other organizations, but careful consideration is required when targeting children in commercials.

Given the growing oligopoly of information online and the fact that a small number of large platforms are providing information on their own global standards, it is necessary to pay more attention to how Japan's unique content reaches its children.

5-3. Expectations of Japan's websites

With the spread of the Internet, it has become easier not only to receive but to send out various types of information, so surely it is possible for Japan to actively send out its own unique content to the world. From this perspective, Japanese sites regrettably seem to lack a conscious point of view on the provision of information. This is also true with children's sites, which are scarce. This may be because they do not seem conscious of who their target viewers are or how to deliver information in a manner that attracts them.

In particular, considering that it is children who will be responsible for the culture and society of the future, providing information to children should be a very important issue. On the other hand, there is the risk of losing cultural diversity due to the globalization of information through the Internet. That is why it is important to effectively provide information that conveys the unique culture of Japan to children and to the world.

We hope that we will be able to qualify more sites from this perspective in the next selection.

Appendix

Examples of overseas approaches: CSM ratings in the U.S.

In creating the Recommendation List in Chapter 4 of this report, we referred to the results of research and surveys conducted by Common Sense Media in the United States and their system of rating scales in order to clarify the principles that constitute the grounds wherever possible. In this chapter, we will report on the outline and characteristics of their ratings system, and discuss in detail what to keep in mind with regard to children's media and the ideal of information provision to parents and children.

Common Sense Media (CSM)⁴

Founded in 2003, the American non-profit organization⁵ Common Sense Media (headquartered in San Francisco) publishes a wide range of scientific and research-based information on children's issues in relation to the media, and carries out aggressive campaigns and actions that have a social impact not only on families and schools but also on Congress, the business community, the media, and more. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of the digital well-being of children and conducts programs and proposals that take into consideration the human rights of children, such as diversity, equality, and social inclusion. The organization includes Common Sense Media, which rates media for children; Common Sense Education, which develops and offers digital K-12 learning materials; and Common Sense Kids Action, which is an advocacy platform. It also conducts its own unique research, surveys, and programs that aim to create a healthy media environment for children.

Overview of CSM ratings

Common Sense Media has its own unique ratings system for all media intended for children. The CSM ratings and reviews by experts in various areas are all free, and the criteria used are strictly independent, with no influence by any particular company, creator, or investor. The ratings are based on all available evidence on children and the media (e.g. development, learning, technology) and they are primarily intended to provide trustworthy information about what media and content parents should choose for their children.

- All of this is supported by the following underlying basic beliefs.
- Ratings are not intended to censor the media but to pursue healthy media for children.
- In the sense that media has a major impact on the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children, media can be considered another parent.
- We want children to respect the feelings of others and become responsible and informed media users.
- Parents should have an opinion on and the right to choose the media with which their children interact.
- Parents need to know about the media that their children interact with and also teach them how to act responsibly in addition to controlling the length of interaction time.

The ratings are broken down by age and media and are rated with five stars (star rating criteria). It also has thematic and skill categories to provide detailed and easily comprehensible information tailored to the needs of parents and the development of children.

⁴ Common Sense Media's website: <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

James, P. Steyer, *Talking Back to Facebook: The Common Sense Guide to Raising Kids in the Digital Age*, Scribner,

⁵ An organization that is equivalent to a Japanese NPO and that holds 501(c)(3) qualifications under the Internal Revenue Code of the United States.

Table 4: CSM ratings criterion and category framework

<p>[Rating by age]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 0–2 • Age 2–4 • Age 5–7 • Age 8–9 • Age 10–12 • Age 13–14 • Age 15–17 	<p>[Category by media]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apps • Books • Books • Games • Movies • Music • Television • Websites
<p>[Star rating criteria]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 stars: The best! • 4 stars: Really good • 3 stars: Just fine; solid • 2 stars: Disappointing • 1 star: Don't bother 	
<p>[Category by theme]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language/reading: Reading, writing, listening comprehension, and speaking in English/other languages • Mathematics: Arithmetic, algebra, geometry, calculations • Science: Physics, astronomy, geology, chemistry, biology • Social studies: History, geography, politics • Art: Visual art, dance, theater, music, film • Hobbies: A pursuit that a person is engaged in depending on personal interest and enthusiasm 	
<p>[Category by skill]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to think and reason (logic, means, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking) • Creativity (the ability to create inventive solutions or new things, innovation) • Self-management (motivation, initiative, effort, personal growth, learning creation) • Emotional development (self-awareness, stress management, resilience, empathy, perspectives) • Communication (ability to communicate information effectively in a variety of ways) • Collaboration (teamwork, breadth of vision, cooperation, the ability to work with others to take on challenges) • Responsibility and ethics (integrity, respect, the ability to embrace diversity and to learn from results) • Tech skills (digital creation, evaluating media, using and applying technology) • Health & fitness (movement, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, physical and mental health) 	

Choosing the right websites for children

The CSM ratings are not simple age-specific ratings, but are distinguished by recognizable characteristics that allow parents to freely choose the ratings system according to their children's development, their own educational policies and values, and their children's interests and temperaments. Below are eight tips for choosing the right websites for children.

[1] Target age

While some sites, like PBS Kids, have a clear target age, this is not clear for most sites. For example, social media like Facebook and Twitter are not supposed to be used by a 15-year-old child, but in reality they are used by children aged 13 and older.

[2] Quality

Is the page design attractive even to children who are familiar with digital technology? Is the site designed to offer good usability? Is it designed to be intuitively easy and simple for even small children? Is it free of ads and adult content? Does it include ad-free pages for small children? Is it trustworthy? (For example, NASA's children's site is more trustworthy than the blogs of strangers.)

[3] Educational value

This is the most important factor in finding the right sites for your children. An even better factor would be edutainment, a combination of entertainment and education. We recommend websites that not only teach math, reading, and other such traditional study subjects, but also allow the expansion of learning capabilities, such as learning creativity and collaboration, the so-called "21st-century skills."

[4] Messages and role models

The impact of media messages on children is very profound, so you should choose websites that reflect the ideas and values that you want your children to learn (the smaller the child, the more susceptible they are to media). It is also important to ensure representation of role models who are suitable for children's growth, for example, people or characters that parents want their children to learn from.

[5] Violent or sexual expressions and word choice

While YouTube has a lot of harmless content for preschoolers, it also has many videos of movie scenes that are sexually explicit, obscene, or unclean, and videos of unpleasant situations. Common Sense Media offers professional guidelines that set a standard of expression (violence, sexual expressions, and word choice) for children of all ages, allowing parents to choose those that best suit their children based on their values.

[6] Consumerism

While websites purport to offer everything free of charge, some have links to online shops that sell associated goods. In other cases, the identity of the site is actually a front-line site for marketing or merchandise sales, or the site may use friendly subscription business tactics to motivate children to make purchases. Talking with children about this issue is very important and it helps them develop media literacy skills.

[7] Alcohol, drugs, and smoking

Many teens easily post photos of themselves engaging in drinking, smoking, drugs, or other illegal activities.

[8] Privacy and safety

COPPA is a law to protect the personal information of children under 13 years old. However, it is difficult to know whether a site collects the personal information of children or adults, and so the key is to know how the collected information is used. Is information diverted from the site and sold to marketers? Is it possible to delete personal information from the site's records? Is the site interactive? Is detailed location information not collected? When choosing the right site for children, it is also helpful to check user reviews.

Also, CSM's ratings by age are a great help in choosing the right websites for children. The age-specific features and age-appropriate content are scientifically analyzed and examined for each of seven stages: ages 0 to 2, 2 to 4, 5 to 7, 8 to 9, 10 to 12, 13 to 14, and 15 to 17. The developmental characteristics of children, rational considerations, advice to families, and other factors are also introduced in detail.

[Age-specific features] [1] Cognitive development
[2] Social and emotional development
[3] Physical development
[4] Technical/Digital literacy

[Age-appropriate content]
[1] Educational value
[2] Positive models & messages
[3] Violent expressions
[4] Fearful expressions
[5] Sexual expressions
[6] Word choice
[7] Commercial messages (consumerism & commercialism)
[8] Risks and problematic behavior

Pursuing digital well-being for parents and children

In his book "*Talking Back to Facebook: The Common Sense Guide to Raising Kids in the Digital Age*," attorney and Common Sense Media founder Jim Steyer argues that parents should be more involved in their children's Internet use. He rings alarm bells for the children of today, who spend more time with media and technology than with their family or in school, putting them at risk in three areas: [1] Relationships, [2] Attention and Addiction, and [3] Privacy. In order to protect children from such dangers, it is important for parents to learn about IT and become role models, Steyer says, stressing the importance of providing scientific and objective information to families.

In creating the Recommendation List in this project, we proceeded with consideration for selection criteria that emphasize the digital well-being of parents and children with reference to these basic beliefs of CSM and their ratings scales based on scientific research and survey results. We also selected sites that contribute to improving the empowerment and literacy of the parents and children of Japan by focusing not only on risks to children, but also on the sound physical and mental development of children and fostering their ability to learn. We hope that many parents and children will make use of this unique Recommendation List for Japan that meets our local needs from a global perspective.

Fumiko Inomata (Ochanomizu University)

School education

The concept of GIGA Schools

According to Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the concept of GIGA Schools is to achieve learning that fosters creativity that is appropriate for children living in the era of Society 5.0 through optimization that suits each and every child fairly, without leaving anyone out, by managing ICT environments, for example, providing all children at a school with one device per person. Herein, GIGA stands for "Global and Innovation Gateway for All," and it can be interpreted to mean global and innovative provision (of education) to everyone.

Specifically, the intent is not for classes in school curricula to be taught entirely using ICT only, but rather to further enhance learning activities by combining cutting-edge ICT with knowledge accumulated through Japan's long history of educational practice, with the aim of maximizing the abilities of children.

The background behind the concept of GIGA Schools is composed of diverse factors. It started from economic measures after a consumption tax increase, and the need for schools to offer online classes due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Japan was also ranked at the bottom of a list of OECD member countries in terms of the frequency of ICT utilization in school curricula (specifically, the lowest in the category of "Using computers to collaborate with other students"), and there are noticeable differences in the development of ICT environments among municipalities in Japan.

Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has put forth a policy based on the installation of educational computers for each student. It also includes, for example, interactive classes based on the responses of each child, individualized learning in accordance with individual educational needs and learning situations, and collaborative learning in which individual children can immediately share their own ideas and come into contact with diverse opinions. It will also promote the introduction of digital textbooks for learners. According to the latest information at the time of writing (December 22, 2020), about 60% of schools from the fifth grade of elementary school to the third grade of junior high school nationwide will introduce digital learning textbooks in the unit of one subject, and the budget has been decided.

Lastly, teacher training is one of the future challenges in this area. The government guidelines for education position the ability to utilize information, which is deeply related to the concept of GIGA Schools, as the basis of learning. Therefore, every teacher primarily needs to have a correct understanding and conception of the ability to utilize information. They also need to be convinced that these things are important. It is also required to implement step-based teacher training whenever required. For example, teachers can try to use ICT for themselves, then apply it to a class with a scenario set for use by students, and then ultimately improve the class with so-called "study logs" or other such means.

Programming education

Programming education has been attracting attention in recent years. The term often refers to elementary school programming education, which has become a new required subject. Junior high school, on the other hand, has doubled the amount that students learn about programming in their industrial arts and home economics (technology) classes. Specifically, the curriculum is centered on two courses: programming of bidirectional content with the use of networks, plus measurement/control programming. In high schools, the current subjects of Social Studies and Information & Information Science will be reorganized into one common required subject called "Information I," which students will use to pursue the scientific understanding of information. All high school students are to learn about programming, irrespective of whether they select a humanities or science course. This series of educational measures and curricula on information science are referred to as programming education. Among these educational measures and curricula, the background behind programming education specifically in elementary school, where it has newly been made compulsory, is considered as follows.

If you look around, we are surrounded by many computers (that are incorporated into devices or electrical appliances) in our daily lives. The ability to understand and effectively use computers is an essential one for children, who will shape the future world and live in it. Also, the world population is going to increase rapidly as Japan's population rapidly decreases. This is a world that not a single adult has ever experienced. In a new world like this, people will encounter and need to deal with problems that are

far outside our current prediction ability. Computer usage and other aspects of information science will undoubtedly become more important than ever.

To use computers effectively and appropriately, it is indispensable to understand how they work, but this does not mean understanding things like the detailed mechanisms of operating systems. Rather, it is important to understand basic things, for example, that a computer does not run unless somebody gives it instructions, which are called a “program,” and that “programming” refers to working out a sequence of such instructions. And above all, it is important for children to actually experience these things. Given this, in Japan and overseas, programming education is now being introduced from the compulsory education stage while embracing STEM disciplines and the changing trends of computer science.

As for the aim of elementary school programming education in Japan, the government guidelines for education serve as the standard for formulating curriculums, and they position the ability to utilize information that involves programming-like thinking (to be described later), which is the primary goal of programming education, as the quality and ability serving as the basis of learning that should be developed across subjects. This clarifies that programming education is an educational activity that should be carried out by a school as a whole, not by a specific subject or area or by some teachers.

Also, the guidebook for elementary school programming education (third edition) divides the aim of elementary school programming education into the following three broad categories.

1. Foster programming-like thinking.
2. Help students become aware of the functions and appeal of programming and the fact that our information society is supported by computers and other information technologies. Also, foster an attitude of solving familiar problems and building a better society by skillfully utilizing computers and other devices.
3. If programming is used as part of other subjects or other school activities, ensure that the learning of that subject or that school activity is prioritized.

Programming-like thinking, which is set as the primary goal, can be defined as the ability to think logically based on the concept of programming. In order to realize the aim of programming education, it is necessary to concretely grasp the specific abilities to foster through programming education and to implement learning activities systematically.

At the same time, it should be noted that the commentary on the government guidelines for elementary school education states that “The aim of programming as learned in the elementary school stage is not to learn a programming language or programming skills.”

Yuki Kobayashi (Ibaraki University)

Youth protection measures in Japan and the internet use environment development law

Overview of youth protection measures in Japan

Even before the advent of smartphones, Internet use in Japan was widespread among young people under 18 years of age. According to a Cabinet Office survey conducted in March 2007, about 58% of elementary school students, 69% of junior high school students, and 75% of high school students used the Internet from a computer, and about 27% of elementary school students, 56% of junior high school students, and 96% of high school students used the Internet from a mobile phone.

It is thought that the Internet provides a platform for information that is undesirable for underdeveloped young people to view, and given that some young people have been victimized through so-called “dating websites” and other sites, the Act on Development of an Environment that Provides Safe and Secure Internet Use for Young People (Act No. 79 of 2008; hereinafter, “Act on Development of an Internet Environment for Young People”) was enacted in June 2008 and took effect on April 1, 2009. Since then, the development of an Internet use environment for young people in Japan has been promoted with a focus on the following.

1. Promoting the use of filtering to prevent young people from viewing harmful information
2. Educating young people and their parents to improve Internet literacy
3. Promoting measures to prevent problems, bullying, and crimes attributable to social media, etc.

Filtering

The Act on Development of an Internet Environment for Young People requires young people to employ filtering when using the Internet on mobile phones in principle. Prior to the spread of smartphones, a filtering service for so-called “feature phones” was provided over the communication lines of mobile phone companies. According to a survey conducted by the Cabinet Office in June 2010, the usage rate of filtering services for mobile phones and PHS among young people was about 76% for elementary school students, 70% for junior high school students, and 50% for high school students, confirming a certain level of popularization.

However, with the rapid spread of smartphones to young people, the usage rate of filtering by young smartphone users is about 40% (44.0% in 2017 and 36.8% in 2018), which is lower than when feature phones were in use. While the filtering service for feature phones was controlled based on the URLs accessed on the communication lines of mobile phone companies, in order to support the diverse Internet usage offered by smartphones (diverse communication lines [cellular/Wi-Fi] and other means [web/apps]), the filtering service for smartphones provided by mobile phone companies takes the form of dedicated apps.

Challenges in filtering and countermeasures

In order to apply the filtering provided by mobile phone companies, it is necessary to install and configure a dedicated app. However, the filtering available for use depends on the mobile phone company and the OS of the smartphone, and parents may not have sufficient knowledge about filtering settings. For these reasons, one factor in the decline in the use of filtering is cited as the difficulty that parents feel about using it.

The filtering provided by mobile phone companies adopts a category classification system in which users are required to set websites or apps into predetermined categories so that the permission or restriction on use is set up for each category. The websites or apps that fall under the categories subject to restriction also have a customization function that allows parents to individually set permissions or restrictions on use. Again, however, parents may not have sufficient knowledge of filtering settings and may therefore believe that filtering could deactivate the services that they want to use. This is cited as a factor in the decline in the use of filtering.

Specifically, as smartphones have spread, the use of social media has also become widespread among young people, and some perceive filtering as something inconvenient that could deactivate social media.

Given this, the development of an Internet use environment for young people in Japan has been promoted, focusing on the following as measures for filtering issues.

1. Creating a climate of awareness of the need for parental controls, including filtering
2. Improving the usability of filtering services

The Act on Development of an Internet Environment for Young People

The enactment of the Environment Development Act

The Act on Development of an Environment that Provides Safe and Secure Internet Use for Young People, abbreviated as “Act on Development of an Internet Environment for Young People,” is an act passed in 2008. It was enacted in the aim of preventing problems involving young people that could result from contact with harmful information on the Internet, due to the high ownership rate of mobile phones among young people at the time and also to the fact that it was extremely easy to access the Internet from mobile phones thanks to the spread of the use of the unique Japanese service i-mode.

Rather than the problem of the content itself, the risks to which young people are exposed online are assumed to be “content risk,” or the risk of exposure to adult violence and other harmful information, and “contact risk,” or the risk of inappropriate contact with adults through information that can lead to random encounters on the Internet. When the act was passed, the latter risks in particular posed a problem, and even the use of online communication sites by young people itself was controversial.⁶ However, in view of the fact that it is an important advantage of the Internet to be able to communicate easily with others, it is not appropriate to uniformly regulate children’s enjoyment of such advantages.

In response, the Environment Development Act was enacted based on the following basic principles: [1] young people gaining the ability to use the Internet appropriately, [2] minimizing their access to harmful information, and [3] private-sector initiatives. More specifically, [1] considering that the propensity of information to harm young people depends on the developmental stage of an individual child, it is important for young people to gain the ability to use the Internet appropriately for their stage of growth, and [2] it is not possible to uniformly define the extension of harmfulness due to the nature of information that is harmful to young people, and it is not appropriate to restrict the provision thereof in light of freedom of expression. Therefore, instead of restricting provision, restrictions should be imposed on the receiving side, where the developmental stage of young people should be taken into consideration. [3] Similarly, from viewpoints such as freedom of expression, it is not desirable for the national government to be directly involved in the criteria for the selection of harmful information for young people, so voluntary efforts should be centered on the private sector. As to [2], the use of filtering has been considered.

The enactment of the Environment Development Act was significant in that it clarified the policy in which the private sector takes the initiative for Internet use by young people and avoiding the risks associated therewith.

The changing Internet use environment and the amendment of the Environment Development Act

Using the Internet on computers often involves parental supervision, but parents are not able to supervise the use of highly personal mobile phones. For this reason, the Environment Development Act mainly targets the use of filtering for when young people access the Internet via mobile phones.

When young people would access the Internet via feature phones, filtering was provided through the networks of mobile phone operators, making it easy to set up and use filtering, and the policy of the Environment Development Act functioned to a certain extent.

However, the rapid spread of smartphones among young people⁷ has caused the Internet use environment and filtering functions to become complex, which has led to a decline in the rate of filtering

⁶ There was even support for the idea of not allowing children or young people to own mobile phones, let alone view specific sites (cf. the stipulation by Ishikawa Children’s General Ordinance that parents must make efforts not to allow elementary or junior high school aged children to have their own mobile phones).

⁷ In 2013, the usage rate of smartphones among teenagers exceeded that of feature phones. (See the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications’ “Survey on the information and communications media usage time and information behavior.”)

usage, the core of the Environment Development Act. While smartphones have the same functionality as computers, the Environment Development Act envisions Internet access from feature phones, as mentioned earlier, so unfortunately, it did not support the rapid spread of smartphones.⁸ Regrettably, the Environment Development Act was not substantially revised until 2018 despite the supplementary provision, which may have considered the possibility of such future changes, that stipulated at the time of its enactment that the status of implementation should be reviewed within three years after its enactment, and that necessary measures should be taken based on the results of the review.⁹

Challenges to the Environment Development Act

(1) Amendment and other slow actions

Quick action is required because the Internet environment changes rapidly. It is not possible to take appropriate actions by revising the Act ten years later. It is necessary to respond promptly, especially because young people grow up quickly. Young people should be sufficiently protected, and they should not be left to grow into unprotected adults due to delays in the actions of the relevant organizations.

Also, at the time of the amendment in 2018, a supplementary provision was given to the effect that after three years, measures to prevent access to harmful information for young people would be reviewed and necessary measures would be taken. This opportunity should be fully utilized.

(2) Appropriateness of basic principles

[1] There is no doubt that it is important for young people to gain the ability to use the Internet appropriately, and this does not depend on changes in the Internet environment.

However, [2] the minimization of young people's access to harmful information is open to discussion. The assumption here is restrictions on reception, but the essence of the Internet is interactive transmission; in other words, both reception and transmission constitute the core of Internet use. When the Environment Development Act was enacted, Japan was focused on contact risks. Controls on reception alone are not sufficient to reduce these risks.¹⁰ As the technology to protect young people is changing, we should reconsider appropriate measures for protecting young people in line with the nature of Internet use and the changing environment.

There is also room for discussion on Basic Principle [3]: private-sector initiatives. At present, the Internet environment is in many cases provided by large-scale platform operators, which are supposed to make decisions on the selection of information at their own discretion. However, such decisions are made on a global criterion basis, and even if the laws and regulations of each country are considered, it is not easy to consider the grade of acceptance in consideration of subtle cultural differences. Private-sector initiatives have the advantage in reflecting diverse values. Given the existence of such large global social media providers, how to reflect diverse values in youth protection is an issue that needs to be reconsidered.

Shino Uenuma (South Toranomon Law Offices)
Yoshihiko Fujikawa (Mobile Content Forum)

⁸ According to the "Survey of the Internet use environment for young people" published by the Cabinet Office in 2018, the smartphone filtering usage rate among young people dropped to 36.8%.

⁹ This amendment gave some consideration to the use of smartphones by young people.

¹⁰ In an environment where the filtering usage rate is high and communication sites are properly targeted for filtering, it was possible to reduce risks on the premise of Basic Principle [2] of the Environment Development Act. In the current situation, however, where the filtering usage rate is declining and the ability to get information from social media is indispensable, we will not be able to reduce risks by taking measures based on Basic Principle [2]. This is because it is difficult to place restrictions on the reception function of social media sites.

Youth Content Research Society members and secretariat establishment

Members and secretariat

Members

Shino Uenuma Attorney-at-Law, South Toranomon Law Offices

Fumiko Inomata Academic Assistant, Institute for Education and Human Development, Ochanomizu University

Yuki Kobayashi Associate Professor, College of Education, Ibaraki University

Secretariat

Takamasa Kishihara, Mobile Content Forum; Managing Director, General Affairs Committee

Yoshihiko Fujikawa, Mobile Content Forum; Representative, Youth Content Research Society

Maki Koshiga, Mobile Content Forum; Secretariat

Mai Fujimoto, Mobile Content Forum; Secretariat

Brief history of Youth Content Research Society members

Shino Uenuma, Attorney-at-Law, South Toranomon Law Offices

<http://www.s-tora.com/index.php?m=attorney&a=detail&id=18>

[Main job titles]

Executive Director, Internet Rating Observation Institute

Civil Conciliation Commissioner, Tokyo Summary Court

Member of the Task Force on Development of an Internet Environment for Young People, Cabinet Office

Visiting Associate Professor (Visiting Professor since 2015), Institute of Information Security

Lecturer (Criminal Defense), Legal Training and Research Institute, the Supreme Court of Japan

Member of the DRP Review Committee, Japan Network Information Center (JPNIC)

Board Member of the Content Evaluation and Monitoring Association (After 2016 Vice-Director)

Auditor, nonprofit organization CANVAS

Working group member for the establishment of the Interpretative Guidelines on Electronic Commerce and Information Property Trading, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

Yuki Kobayashi, Associate Professor, College of Education, Ibaraki University

<https://info.ibaraki.ac.jp/Profiles/28/0002757/profile.html>

[Education/research activities]

Utilizing ICT in class, organizing study groups, and giving guidance/advice on information moral education.

Conducting research on the effective use of tablets, which are increasingly being adopted in schools.

Developing class courses and training for elementary school programming education.

Conducting research on class courses focused on teaching strategies for teachers and for the cultivation of communication skills.

[Main publications]

My First Book of Programming: For Parents and Children Before Starting Programming

Practical Teaching Training for Better Understanding of School Scenarios

Guidebook for Elementary School Programming Education Training

Education Methods and Techniques: Instructional Design for Independent, Interactive, and Deep Learning

Using Tablet Devices in Classes

EMA Mobile Phone Internet Guidebook 4 (Consumer Edition), Learning Resource Package

(References)

http://ema-edu.mcf.or.jp/_data/howtowalk04/4_tm.pdf

Fumiko Inomata, Academic Assistant, Institute for Education and Human Development, Ochanomizu University

<http://www-w.cf.ocha.ac.jp/iehd/member/inomata/>

[Main research/activity fields]

Media literacy, children and media, and corporate CSR (Education)

[Previous main social activities]

Collaborator, “Conference of research collaborators on measures against harmful environments surrounding young people,” MEXT (2001–2003)

Member of the expert committee “Promotion of measures against harmful environments surrounding young people: Survey and research on measures against Internet problems such as defamatory posts in online forums,” MEXT (2007–2008)

Member of “Study group for video game ratings and social acceptance,” CERO (2007–2011)

Member of the advisory council “Promotion of measures against harmful environments surrounding young people: Survey on the development and management of ordinances concerning measures against harmful information surrounding youth in municipalities, etc.,” MEXT (2008–2009)

Council member, “Rating and filtering liaison council/study group (entrusted by the Internet Association),” METI (2008–2012)

Standards formulation committee member, Content Evaluation and Monitoring Association (EMA) (2009–2018)

Executive committee member, “High School Student ICT Conference,” Japan Internet Safety Promotion Association (2015–present)

[Other job titles]

Researcher at Institute of Current Business Studies, Showa Women's University
Saitama family education advisor

Held meetings of the Research Society

1st Youth Content Research Society, Mar. 3, 2020

Topics:

- Explaining the establishment of the Youth Content Research Society and its action plan
- Presentations from Research Society members
- Discussion

2nd Youth Content Research Society, Mar. 27, 2020

Topics:

- List of websites for children
- Considerations

3rd Youth Content Research Society, Apr. 20, 2020

Topics:

- Meeting report
- List of websites for children
- Selection policy
- Checklist

4th Youth Content Research Society, May 19, 2020

Topics:

- Meeting report
- Vision for the Recommendation List
- Selection criteria
- Checklist
- Recommendation List candidates

5th Youth Content Research Society, Jun. 18, 2020

Topics:

- Principles and concepts of checklist items
- Vision for the Recommendation List
- Recommendation List candidates

6th Youth Content Research Society, Jul. 8, 2020

Topics:

- Meeting report
- Candidate site evaluation

7th Youth Content Research Society, Jul. 27, 2020

Topics:

- Candidate sites

8th Youth Content Research Society, Aug. 11, 2020

Topics:

- Candidate sites

9th Youth Content Research Society, Sep. 8, 2020

Topics:

- Final plan of Recommendation List candidates
- Table of contents of the report

10th Youth Content Research Society, Oct. 9, 2020

Topics:

- Report (Selected sites)

11th Youth Content Research Society, Nov. 5, 2020

Topics:

- Comments on points evaluated and points to note

12th Youth Content Research Society, Dec. 10, 2020

Topics:

- Meeting report
- Evaluation sheet by site
- General remarks
- Report structure

13th Youth Content Research Society, Jan. 21, 2021

Topics:

- Report structure

14th Youth Content Research Society, Feb. 19, 2021

Topics:

- Checking the report draft

15th Youth Content Research Society, Mar. 19, 2021

Topics:

- Report
- Release ideas

◆ Mobile Content Forum (MCF)

MCF is an industry group of companies involved in the mobile content distribution business, and it was organized for the purpose of revitalizing the mobile content environment. Its mission is to build smooth relationships with consumers and related organizations and to support the activities of the industry and its members in the aim of achieving mutual prosperity with society for the sound development of the mobile content industry. It is made up of 80 member companies (as of Mar. 2021), mainly content providers.

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