

Empowering and Protecting Youth in the Big Data Era: Issues and Perspectives from the EU and U.S.

**Event hosted by TACD
22 March 2017**

National Press Club
529 14th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20045

Introduction and background

Young people are growing up in a digital world of constant connectivity – engaging 24/7 through social media, mobile devices, gaming platforms, and video streaming channels. While offering important opportunities for youth to express their creativity, explore and learn, interact with their peers, and participate in civic discourse, contemporary digital media can also pose threats to their privacy and can negatively impact their development. Children and teens spend or influence an estimated \$1.2 trillion a year worldwide. Media companies, programmers, and advertisers are developing hundreds of new digital ventures designed to tap into this growing lucrative youth global market.

Powered by the forces of Big Data, contemporary digital marketing relies on extensive data collection, tracking and profiling. Food companies use an array of sophisticated techniques to promote junk food and soft drinks to young people through interactive games, mobile phones, and other digital platforms. Children and teens are avid users of social media like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Twitter, where marketers insert their brands into identity development, peer relationships, and social interactions. Toymakers and other companies are eagerly embracing the so-called “Internet of Things,” creating a new generation of Internet-connected toys that take advantage of Big Data capabilities. Consumer and privacy groups recently filed a series of coordinated complaints with regulators in the U.S. and the E.U over a new Internet-connected doll, My Friend Cayla, which collects children’s voice data and shares it with third parties.

While there are some regulatory policies in place, in both the EU and the US, their ability to address the Big Data practices of today’s contemporary children’s digital marketplace is limited. There is an urgent need for fresh thinking about how to balance children’s fundamental rights to privacy, safety, and consumer protection, with other, important rights, including the right to participate fully in the digital public sphere. In the U.S., the 1998 Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), was revised in 2012 to reflect a range of contemporary data collection and digital marketing practices. In Europe, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which will come into force in May 2018, contains a number of new data safeguards for children, including a provision adapted from COPPA’s model for parental permission, raising the age requirement from 13 to 16. While individual Member States can vote to exempt themselves from this requirement, the new regulation has prompted concerns that youth will not be able to access social networking platforms and many other digital media services.

The current debate over the General Data Protection Regulation, along with other recent EU policy developments, creates the opportunity for a broader, international conversation about what the best framework should be to ensure fair marketing and data protections for young people in today’s global media system.

This special half day meeting brings together consumer and privacy advocates, academics, policy makers, and industry representatives for a focused roundtable discussion to:

- identify the key issues raised by emerging trends in contemporary children’s digital media
- assess the current state of regulatory policy in both the EU and the United States
- exchange perspectives from various stakeholders
- highlight opportunities for consensus building and collaboration
- begin crafting an agenda for collaborative transatlantic strategies and policies.