

FOSI Research: The Online Generation Gap – Contrasting Attitudes and Behaviours of Parents and Teens

Aims

Conducted on behalf of the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) by Hart Research Associates in the U.S. in October 2012, this quantitative study was designed to explore teens' and parents' online behaviours and attitudes. The findings aimed at establishing a better understanding of behaviours and attitudes towards online safety, parents' perceptions and teens' use of various online and mobile platforms, and the reported methods and tools employed by parents to keep their teens safe online.

Key Findings

- The report revealed a striking disconnect between how many teens say their parents monitor their online activity and their parents reported oversight: whilst only 39% of teens reported that their parents exercised any oversight or monitoring of their online activity, 84% of parents reported such monitoring – a 45% gap in perception.
- Similar to reports of monitoring, parents also claim to be more informed about their teen's online activity than teens believe them to be: 62% of teens believed their parents to be well informed about their online activity, whereas 91% of parents reported that level of awareness - a perception gap of 29%.
- The greatest gaps in knowledge between teen's activities and parents knowledge of online activities are exposed on social networking and media sharing sites such as Twitter, Tumblr and Pinterest. On Twitter for example, whilst 38% of parents said they were well informed about their teen's use of the site, only 14% of teens using Twitter would say the same about their parents, a perception gap of 24%. For other forms of media asked about in the survey, gaps in perception were much lower (texting: 3% gap) or completely absent (online gaming: no gap).
- Both teens and parents reported feeling generally safe online: 95% of teens said they felt very (37%) or somewhat (58%) safe online. Similarly, 94% of parents said they felt their teen was very (36%) or somewhat (58%) safe online.
- When asked an open ended question about what it meant to feel 'safe' online, the largest percentage of teen's responses (25%) referred to privacy and ensuring no one could access their personal information or identify them from online information. Posed the same question, the majority of parents (29%) cited 'stranger danger' as their top concern in keeping teen's safe online.
- When asked about specific concerns online teens and parents were roughly on the same page. Privacy topped the concerns of both teens and parents about the negative consequences of online activity: 67% of teens reported this concern alongside 51% of parents. Significant gaps were evident in the salience of teen's exposure to harmful content (79% of parents are concerned alongside 53% of teens) and a stranger learning something about a teen from online posts (78% of parents alongside 59% of teens), with parents reporting higher concern in both cases.
- Teens are taking a number of steps to protect their privacy online, particularly on social networking sites: a large proportion have set privacy settings on their SNS profile (81%) and placed limits on who they share posts with (65%).
- Despite this, notable proportions of teens reported engaging in potentially risky behaviour online. For example, nearly half of teens reported 'friending' someone on an SNS that they don't know personally (49%) and a quarter had shared personal details online such as their school (25%) and personal phone number (21%) with someone they had not met personally.

- Teens revealed that they rely most heavily on their parents for online safety information (74%), followed by school or teachers (66%) and other adults (51%). Only 29% reported getting their online safety information from social media, such as Facebook or Twitter.
- Parents reported doing several things to keep their children safe online, including some actions of which teens were not fully aware. In fact a significant gap exists between what parents are saying they are doing to keep their teens safe online and what teens say their parents are doing in this area. For example, whilst 93% of parents reported having a conversation with their teen about online safety, only 61% of teens report having such a conversation with their parents.
- Whilst teens reported steps they are taking to remain safe and vigilant online, nearly half (43%) of teens reported posting something online they later regretted. Of these responses, the main reasons for regretting a post was that it was mean to someone else (28%) or shared too much information (28%).

Policy Context

The survey indicated that teens' concerns about online safety parallel the concerns of their parents more closely than parents realize, and that many teens are acting on these concerns by taking steps to protect their privacy and personal information. Nevertheless, the report found significant gaps in perceptions around parental knowledge, parental monitoring and specific risks online. Additionally, teens were found to be engaging in a number of risky activities online such as sharing personal information with strangers. These gaps in perception reveal the need to improve communication between teens and parents about online safety and points to the active role for government, industry and civil society to play in supporting parents in this task.

Methodology

The study was based on two nationwide online surveys, the first involving 511 13-17 year-olds who used the internet at least occasionally, and the second of 500 parents of 13-17 year-olds who accessed the internet. To simplify administration, respondents were asked to think about their child who had the most recent birthday in answering the survey questions.

Background

The research was carried out in the U.S. in October of 2012 by Hart Research Associates on behalf of the Family Online Safety Institute, and was jointly funded by Google and Microsoft.

Source <http://www.fosi.org/images/stories/research/hartreport-onlinegap-final.pdf> (full report)
<http://www.fosi.org/images/stories/research/hart-report-executive-summary-online.pdf> (executive summary)
<http://www.fosi.org/images/stories/research/fosi2012-the-online-generation-gap-research-powerpoint.pdf> (Power Point)

Research Team Hart Research Associates

Contact information Jen Hanley (jhanley@fosi.org)

RH#45 has been produced by FOSI for the UKCCIS Evidence Group