Privacy Permanence Paradox: Protecting Preteens

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Issues

- Increasing youth presence on digital media (and acceptability): Information youth share online is collected by companies and shared with third parties (trusted partners, affiliates, and the like)
- Friendly Fire: Children under 13 years old receive some protection online via the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA, 1998) and the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA, 2000) but only for websites/programs/apps that specifically target youth under 13 years of age. Youth digital use is vast.
- Digital Literacy Awareness: Has focused on cyberbullying and stranger danger as opposed to the collection, storage, packaging, and selling of personal information by companies and third parties

Key Findings

The underlying theme identified by the research team is what we call a permanence paradox: when an individual engages in online information exchanges without mediating the risk due to a lack of knowledge of the long-term value of their personal information.

- General lack of awareness of the risks of exchanging information online among middle school youth, parents/caregivers, and educators as well as our undergraduate student participants.
- Evolving online presence of middle school youth under the age of 13 at school and home (an increased use/ownership of devices by youth)
- Parents, educators, and older siblings act as significant influencers and enablers of device use and online activities (e.g., allowing and creating social media accounts for their children under the age of 13)
- Parents were greatest influence (46%), friends (43%), siblings (28%), teachers (20%), other (14%), none of the above (5%) and (other included themselves, other relatives, YouTube, and advertisements)
- 7th grade technology leap illustrates an increase in device use/activity (particularly social media that target adults)
- Increasing use of online sites for homework assignments from educators, such as YouTube, intensifies the vulnerability of middle school youth
  - YouTube is the primary online resource used in the classroom and for homework assignments as reported by the teachers in our sample (confusion as to what is a social media site)

Project Goals

- Research motivations and actions of middle school youth and two primary influencers of youth—their parents/caregivers and their educators
- Involve college undergraduates in the process of working to understand privacy issues facing middle school youth
- Create educational privacy campaigns to inform middle school youth about privacy risks involved with exchanging information online

Research Process

- Focus Groups with middle-school-aged youth
- Surveys of middle-school-aged youth
- Surveys of educators of middle-school-aged youth
- Surveys of parents of at least one middle-school-aged child
- One-on-one interviews with parents of at least one middle-school-aged child

Grant Deliverables

- 3 educational social media marketing campaigns designed by university undergraduates at CSUN.
- Digital Literacy and Consumer Information iBook
- Website: http://www.youthprivacyprotection.org

Youth Privacy Protection Campaigns

- Next steps: Distribute campaigns to educate youth, parents, and educators and assess campaign effectiveness
- Campaign outcome measures: Knowledge of online risks and behavior change(s) associated with third-party online information acquisition and use
- Future research: Youth online information sharing and digital dependence

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