

Digital Trust Foundation

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Project: A Youth-Driven Information Privacy Education Campaign

Abstract for Submission to FTC PrivacyCon January 2016

We propose to present research on an understudied and assumed protected group of youth online – those under the age of 13. Our research project funded by the Digital Trust Foundation¹ is entitled “A Youth-Driven Information Privacy Education Campaign” 2015-16. In this project we focus on children’s use of devices to access, use, and share online material. To date, we have conducted focus groups with middle-school aged children under 13 and have survey data from parents and middle school teachers. We are working with our university marketing students to develop an information campaign designed to enhance the digital literacy and online security of youth under 13. Data analyses used to create concepts for the educational campaign will be complete in December 2015 and both will be ready to present at PrivacyCon.

The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (1998) provides protection of children’s information from online sites specifically targeting youth under 13 years of age. Research shows that youth under 13 are active on sites that target a broader age range. For instance, a 2013 Pew Report indicates 89% of children 12-13 years of age share their real name on social media, 82% of them share photos of themselves and 79% share their birthdays on social media (Madden et al. 2013). Our research explores this further and includes in-depth qualitative data gathered from middle-school youth 10 to 12 years of age, survey data from parents of children 10-12 years of age, and survey data from middle-school teachers of children in that age group.

Early themes uncovered during the focus groups relate to youth use of digital media, understanding of information use, and understanding of privacy protection. We find that youth under 13 are active on social media and those who are not active users, desire to be. Peers, parents and schools are influencers for youth and enable their introduction to online activity and social media use. Even our preliminary findings are startling and indicate that further education and protection of our youth is necessary and we believe our completed research will provide valuable insight for the attendees at PrivacyCon.

Madden, Mary et al (2013, May 21), “Teens, Social Media, and Privacy,” Pew Research Report, download available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/05/21/teens-social-media-and-privacy/>

¹ The Digital Trust Foundation was created as part of a settlement with Facebook concerning its “Beacon” program. For more information: <http://digitaltrustfoundation.org>