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**DIGITAL MEDIA TRENDS AND PARTICIPATION**

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Social Impacts of Digital Media is Volume 324 in the ‘Issues in Society’ series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC
The rapid uptake of digital technologies has hugely impacted on the way we communicate, relate, learn, work, and spend our leisure time. Digital media literacy is the ability to access, understand and participate or create content using digital media. This ability is becoming integral to effective participation in the digital economy and Australian society. Those who do not adapt may fall victim to the ‘digital divide’ and be excluded.

The ‘digital revolution’ has both positive and negative effects, which are explored in this timely book. On the positive side, people are increasingly being connected across distances with the greatest of ease and innovation via mobile phones, online social networking, blogging, gaming and e-learning. On the negative side are a range of social impacts that are also explored in this book, including internet addiction, cyberbullying, inappropriate exposure to pornography, privacy risks, and cyber crime.

This book presents the topic in three chapters: Digital media trends and participation; Social media; and Online safety.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Titles in the ‘Issues in Society’ series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the ‘Issues in Society’ series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:
➤ Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
➤ Website fact sheets
➤ Magazine and journal articles
➤ Statistics and surveys
➤ Government reports
➤ Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION
As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES
The ‘Exploring issues’ section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH
This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The ‘Web links’ section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.
Chapter 1

Digital media trends and participation

MAPPING THE INTERNET IN AUSTRALIA

We should spend less time worrying about what the Net might do to us and spend more time figuring out what it could achieve for us all, writes Swinburne University’s Julian Thomas

The internet is everywhere: at work, at home, and on the move. If Kevin Rudd’s plans come to anything, it will soon be in every school. The underlying technologies are scarcely three decades old; some of the most popular sites, such as YouTube and Facebook, only a few years. But this new world of information and communication is now, for many of us, an utterly everyday experience.

What is equally remarkable is how little we really know about how the Net is used, where and by whom. The Net may be all around us, but it is still very strange. We know that the Net is changing rapidly, with broadband and new kinds of social media. But we don’t know what difference broadband actually makes, and whether it will be worth the $5 billion or so the government is planning to spend.

Recent work in Australia by researchers as part of the World Internet Project is tackling these and other questions on several fronts. Like the global Human Genome Project, this study of the Net is an ambitious, collaborative, worldwide attempt to map something that was very recently unthinkable. It has the potential to tell us a great deal about who we now are or more precisely, who Australians are becoming in the new era of networks. The work will also help us gauge the real prospects for turning Australia into one of those new, desirable ‘knowledge economies’ based on innovation and creativity.

Perhaps the most striking finding of the project so far is that while the Net may seem to be everywhere, a fifth of Australians have never used it. And in Britain, the non-users are almost a third of the adult population. In other words, there is a digital divide in Australia and it reflects patterns of uptake that are repeated elsewhere in the prosperous West. If you’re male, employed or studying, if you have a university degree and a higher than average income, you are more likely to be online.

These patterns are familiar, but the Net is changing, and computers have been getting cheaper. The divide is not as simple as the old idea of the better-off information ‘haves’ and the struggling ‘have nots’. Lower-income families with children are much more likely to have access to the Net than those without children. Many older non-users actually do access the Net through their friends and families. So the digital divide is, in some cases, more likely to be a digital choice.

At the same time, new divides are appearing around the more recent internet technologies. In Australia, just under four in five home connections are now broadband. That means that about half the population have it, and half don’t, but that’s changing quickly, because the technology is in a rapid take-up phase. Although the quality of our broadband may not match that of some European and Asian countries, Australia has recently jumped a few notches in the OECD’s league table in this area.

Broadband is much more than an improved version of the old dialup access: it seems to change what people do online in quite fundamental ways. It is helping to transform something we have long thought of as dry IT into a social, cultural and political technology. Broadband users spend more time on the Net. Six out of 10 users under the age of 30 say they watch less TV. For women even more than for men, broadband dramatically changes the online experience.

So the Net is now coming into its own. It’s shaking up traditional media, especially television, less so newspapers, books and magazines. And it’s changing politics, as we saw in the federal election last year. Those who are online think the Net matters politically; those who are not are unsure. What is the point of this sort of research? A global, long-run study of the Net is useful for many people: for policy makers, for consumers, businesses and innovators.

This kind of knowledge has another possible benefit, if it can help make what now seems strange a bit less scary. We could then spend a little less time worrying about what the Net might do to us or our children, and some more time figuring out what it could achieve for us all.

Julian Thomas works in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at Swinburne University. He is an author of the Centre’s new report ‘The Internet in Australia’.

Source: Australian Policy Online | www.apo.org.au
12 August 2008

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The overwhelming majority of Australians are internet users. When we talked to them, four in five Australians had used the internet in the past three months, up from 72.6 per cent in 2007. By international standards Australia’s level of internet use is very high. In terms of home access, the vast majority of connections are now broadband (94.2 per cent).

Internet use still varies between different groups although these differences have lessened since 2007. Students, employed persons, younger people, higher educated and higher income individuals are all more likely to use the internet than retired people, home-makers, older people, lower educated and lower income individuals.

... but there is still a digital divide
Slightly more than an eighth of the population has never used the internet, while just fewer than 6 per cent of Australians are ex-users. Ex-users and non-users have different reasons for not using the internet. Ex-users are more likely to cite being too busy or not having a computer or internet connection while non-users are more likely to say they are confused by the technology or have no interest in the internet. Although broadband is growing quickly just under a quarter of Australians do not have broadband access at home.

The internet in Australia is maturing and broadband is still growing
The internet is a maturing technology in Australia. A third of internet users have been online for more than ten years while a further half have been online for five years or more. A very small proportion of users had taken up use in the past year. On average men have been online 19 months longer than women. Broadband access however, is still in a take-up phase, with new users coming mostly from non-connected households. In 2007, just under four in five households with internet access had a broadband connection, by 2005 this had increased to just under 95 per cent.

The internet is becoming increasingly integral to Australians’ lives
Well over half of our sample of internet users describe the internet as ‘very important’ to their current way of life while almost three in ten say that it is ‘important’. Three-quarters of users feel that the internet makes life easier while more than 9 in 10 say that it is a fast and efficient means to gain information.

Internet use is increasing
Across almost all activities that we asked about, there was an increase in the proportion of people undertaking the activity as well as an increase in frequency. When combined with the 10 per cent increase in the number of people using the internet, this represents a large increase in overall internet use in the last two years.

The internet is an important way for people to keep in touch
Overall internet use has increased the time people spend communicating with friends and family and this effect has strengthened in the last two years. This impact of the internet is particularly strong in Australia which recorded the highest levels of increased contact with both friends and families amongst our comparison countries.

On the other hand, for a significant proportion of people their internet use has resulted in less time spent face-to-face with household members but this effect has not changed in the last two years.

Email is the most popular means for communicating online and its use has grown in the last two years. More than 8 in 10 Australians check their email at least once a day. Instant messaging is also a popular and growing communications tool with more than a quarter messaging daily. There was strong growth in the use of the internet to make telephone calls with almost 3 in 10 now doing this and those born overseas recording even higher levels underlining the importance of internet as a communications tool.

The overwhelming majority of Australians are internet users. When we talked to them, four in five Australians had used the internet in the past three months, up from 72.6 per cent in 2007. By international standards Australia’s level of internet use is very high.

The internet changes media use
‘The internet is now users’ most important source of...
information and its importance has increased slightly in the last two years. This is a global phenomenon – in all but one of our comparison countries the internet was now users’ most important source of information.

Just under three-quarters of Australian users described the internet as ‘important’ or ‘very important’ compared to just under 40 per cent for television and just over 40 per cent for newspapers or radio. Around 7 in 10 users would visit an online news service if either a large international or large local story was breaking.

Television watching is the media-related activity most affected by internet use. Four in 10 users say they watch less television since going online and this impact is strongly related to age. Nearly half of those aged 18-24 watch less television since access compared to only 14 per cent of those aged 65 or more. Overall less than a quarter of internet users feel they read newspapers or books less often since gaining internet access.

Students, employed persons, younger people, higher educated and higher income individuals are all more likely to use the internet than retired people, home-makers, older people, lower educated and lower income individuals.

The question of whether internet users are prepared to pay for journalism is now topical, with many commentators foreseeing the demise of newspapers. We asked respondents whether and how much they would be prepared to pay to read an online newspaper. Nearly three quarters of Australians say they would not consider paying (71.4 per cent). Just 7.2 per cent would pay the current price of a printed newspaper ($1.50).

**The internet enables creativity**

The proportion of users posting pictures or photographs increased dramatically from 25 to 46 per cent from 2007 to 2009, and the proportion of people posting video also more than doubled. Despite this, a smaller proportion of users in 2009 than 2007 felt that their internet use had enabled them to share both creative work they liked with others, and to share their own creative work. The proportion of users who agreed that the internet had encouraged them to produce their own creative work did not change significantly over the two year period.

**The internet is a major source of entertainment**

The internet is an increasingly important source of entertainment, and is now challenging television as Australians’ most important entertainment medium. In 2009 a higher proportion of users described the internet as a ‘very important’ source of entertainment than television. (Although if we look at sources of entertainment considered ‘important’ as well as ‘very important’, television moves ahead of the Net.) We would expect that as broadband access improves in both speed and coverage that entertainment uses of the internet will evolve further, and grow in significance.

Downloading or listening to music online, surfing or browsing the web, finding out information about food such as recipes, looking for information about restaurants and visiting sites dedicated to particular artists are the most popular entertainment-related internet activities – all of these activities recorded significant growth between 2007 and 2009.

While downloading content increased in the last two years internet users were more likely to access their movies and music offline than online. Even in terms of digital music, users are more likely to copy their own or a friend’s CD than to buy online. Relative to our comparison countries Australia is around mid-level in terms of downloading or watching video content online. Preparedness to do this is heavily related to age, 6 in 10 young Australians were downloading or watching video content online at least weekly compared to only 1 per cent of those aged 65 or more.

HOW AUSTRALIA ACCESSES AND USES THE INTERNET

- In 2008-09, the number of households with a broadband internet connection had almost quadrupled from 2004-05 to an estimated 5.0 million households. This represented three out of five households in Australia and 86% of households with internet access.

- Overall income that resulted from orders received via the internet for goods or services increased significantly from $56.7 billion to $81.0 billion over the period between 2005-06 and 2007-08.

- During 2008-09, two-thirds (67%) of people aged 15-34 years accessed the internet every day, compared with around half the people aged 35 years or more.

- An estimated 841,000 children (31%) aged 5 to 14 years had access to their own mobile phones in 2009.

Source: Year Book Australia, 2009-10
Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 2010

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Australians’ preparedness to substitute digital for hard copy content does not appear to have increased in the last two years. Half of our internet users would not consider downloading music or movies instead of buying hard copy at any price. Only around 1 in 20 users would be prepared to pay a price comparable to an offline version.

The internet changes politics
The proportion of users who agreed that the internet has become important for the political campaign process increased markedly in the last two years (45.6 per cent to 58.3 per cent) while non-user agreement increased even more (35.8 per cent to 57.2 per cent). In 2007 non-users were more sceptical than users about the internet’s capacity to empower citizens.

Perhaps more importantly, a sizeable proportion of non-users simply didn’t know what impact the internet was having on politics. In 2009 the differences between users and non-users on this question decreased and non-users were less likely to answer ‘don’t know’.

Internationally Australia is amongst the more sceptical countries in terms of our attitude to whether internet use can help people have a greater say in what governments do.

Most Australians support internet regulation and the NBN
The majority of Australians do not think that the internet is over-regulated. Just over 4 in 10 think that the current amount of regulation is about right. A further 4 in 10 would like more regulation. There is very strong support for restricting children’s access to the internet. An overwhelming 82.8 per cent felt there should be some restrictions but almost all of these people felt that responsibility should be shared by parents, schools, government and internet service providers. Just under three-quarters of Australians think the development of Labor’s National Broadband Network is a good idea. Support for the NBN is slightly stronger amongst younger people and more strongly supported by internet users than non-users.

Slightly more than an eighth of the population has never used the internet, while just fewer than 6 per cent of Australians are ex-users.

People shop online, with reservations
Australia had the highest level of both looking for information about goods and services online and purchasing online of our comparison countries.
In 2007 less than half of our sample of internet users purchased at least one product a month. By 2009, this had increased to two-thirds. Those who used the internet for purchases spent on average $200 per month online (the median amount spent was $100). Older Australians are less likely to purchase goods online. Almost 9 in 10 users research products online. Making travel bookings (76.1 per cent), paying bills (71.6 per cent), banking (75.0 per cent) and purchasing event tickets (65.1 per cent) were all popular online activities.

While a majority of users are concerned about credit card security online, fewer report being ‘very’ or ‘extremely concerned’. Privacy concerns involved with e-commerce have stayed around the same level.

Source: CCI Digital Futures 2010: The Internet in Australia, May 2010
Promoting media literacy is a key to ensure that Australians are equipped with tools to make informed choices about media and communications services and to enable people to participate effectively in the digital economy.

WHAT IS DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY?

Digital media literacy is often understood as the ability to access, understand and participate or create content using digital media. Developments in digital technology have had significant effects on the way individuals interact with communications and media services. An increasingly wide range of sources of information, ways of doing business, services (including government services) and entertainment are now commonly made available and accessed online and/or through digital media.

WHY DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY IMPORTANT?

The field of media literacy research is well established and takes in different forms of literacy including:
➤ Classic literacy (reading-writing-understanding)
➤ Audiovisual literacy (related to mass media such as film and television), and
➤ Digital literacy (which relates to the technical skills required by modern digital technologies).

In the last decade, in both academic and policy discourses, the concept of media literacy has broadened from its traditional focus on print and audiovisual media to encompass the internet and other convergent media.

The ACMA is particularly interested in the increasing role of digital media and technology in social, public and private lives. This informs the focus of the ACMA’s media literacy research on issues relating to digital media.

... the concept of media literacy has broadened from its traditional focus on print and audiovisual media to encompass the internet and other convergent media.

WHY IS DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY IMPORTANT?

The ability to confidently use, participate in and understand digital media and services is becoming an important prerequisite to effective participation in the digital economy and Australian society more generally.

Australians need to have at least basic digital media literacy skills because:
➤ The development of Australia’s digital economy will be constrained if its citizens are limited in their ability to participate because they lack adequate skills or confidence
➤ Those unable to participate will be excluded from the benefits that will increasingly flow from digital media as they become more integrated into everyday social, cultural and economic life
➤ Those who are not digitally literate, or who have low levels of digital literacy, will be less likely to have the confidence, knowledge and understanding needed to participate in a safe, secure and informed manner in the digital media and communications environments they enter.
A digitally literate person should be able to:

- Understand the nature of different types of digital services and the content they provide
- Have basic capacity and competence to get connected, to operate and access various digital technologies and services
- Participate confidently in the services provided by digital technologies
- Exercise informed choices in online and digital media and communications environments
- Have an adequate level of knowledge and skills to be able to protect themselves and their families from unwanted, inappropriate or unsafe content.

“With an increasingly complex array of services and technologies, people need to be confident and skilled in navigating an expanding range and choice of content while at the same time understanding how they might protect themselves and their families from exposure to harmful or inappropriate material. They need to know how to manage security and privacy risks online and be able to make informed decisions between various platforms and competing service providers.”


**EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATING DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY IN ACTION**

**Access to basic services**

Across Australia an increasing range of services are made available online, including banking and government services. In some instances companies may replace face-to-face transactions with online services.

The ability to effectively access these online services requires a level of digital media literacy which spans:

- **Basic access**: the ability to access broadband internet by a straightforward connection to the necessary device and technology

- **Understanding**: users require a level of understanding about the risks associated with undertaking certain activities online. This means, for example, knowledge about how banks will communicate online with customers (never via email), the importance of maintaining regular security updates and virus checks, and the legitimacy of security certificates when passing on credit card details via the internet.

**Researching information**

The 2008 Norton Online Living Report found that 96 per cent of online children in Australia find their information for school projects on the internet. Increasingly older Australians are also turning to the internet to research products, companies and other information needed to make daily decisions in life. But how do people select the most appropriate sources? Should they use information from, say, a blog, Facebook comments, an online newspaper, a refereed academic paper, wikipedia, or some other source?

Making effective use of the internet to research a subject requires a degree of digital media literacy that enables the user to correctly interpret the range and quality of information available online.

**Making effective use of the internet to research a subject requires a degree of digital media literacy that enables the user to correctly interpret the range and quality of information available online.**

**Social media**

For many young people belonging to an online social network shapes the nature of peer relations not only online but also in other contexts too. A growing body of research suggests there are a number of positive benefits associated with the rise in online social networks, which include greater opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and more self-expression, including participation in new creative forms through blogs, video production, video or picture manipulation.

Some scholars suggest that the ability to embrace participatory cultures has become a new form of ‘hidden curriculum’ which is starting to shape who will succeed and who will be left behind as people enter school and move out into the workplace.

However, the ACMA research indicates that almost 50 per cent of Australians don’t know where to find information about protecting personal information when using social media. Effective participation in social media activities depends not only on knowing how to access and use broadband services and social networking websites, but also understanding when and where it is appropriate to divulge personal information online.

‘What is digital media literacy and why is it important?’, 28 July 2009
Australian Communications and Media Authority | www.acma.gov.au
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ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIFFERENT DIGITAL MEDIA

Findings from this study involving non- and limited users of digital media indicated that their unmet digital media needs are largely associated with the internet. This is because they believe that in terms of enabling them to participate more effectively in society, learning how to use the internet is more important than learning how to use new features on their mobile phone.

The internet is regarded as being unique and offering something they cannot get elsewhere. It provides a range of different opportunities to assist people in everyday social, cultural and economic situations. In contrast, the additional features that they do not use on mobile phones can be accessed in other ways, such as using a standalone GPS or accessing the internet on a computer. There is therefore less incentive for non- and limited users of digital media to learn how to use this type of application on their phone.

People did not necessarily have the same attitude towards different technologies. It became apparent that there was some association between the usage of different digital media among research participants, in that non-users or low users who were uncomfortable with one technology were sometimes uncomfortable with another. However this was not a strong association. Instead, the research found that usage patterns of different types of digital media tended to be highly individual depending on people’s own needs, motivations and the usage context.

Overarching reasons for limited usage

There were two main reasons for the research participants limited use of digital media.

Firstly, they claimed that it was not a priority for them to purchase, understand and use new technology.

Secondly, most of the research participants held the view that it was too difficult to change their habits. For many, using new digital media was regarded as a real stretch that would involve a complete overhaul and change of lifestyle. Findings indicate that as long as people have an alternative, easy option to using digital media they are likely to use that method either out of habit, convenience and/or fear.

The internet is regarded as being unique and offering something they cannot get elsewhere.

Awareness of the benefits of using digital media

Despite the cynicism about using digital media, there was relatively widespread awareness of the benefits of using digital media, in particular the internet. This is because people recognised that the internet is playing an increasingly significant role in society. Many people were aware of the benefits of the internet for their own family and friends. They were also increasingly hearing positive stories about new technologies in the media.

The main benefits that people cited were the convenience and time saving factors that come with using digital media, such as paying bills online or sending an email with news to a friend abroad, as well as the wealth of information sources available at their fingertips. However, it was apparent that the majority of our sample did not appreciate the full extent of the benefits that are on offer through using digital media, which makes them less curious to learn about it. Thus, there is scope to communicate the full benefits of using digital media to encourage take-up.
Overarching attitudes among non- and limited users
There are two key factors that affect people's attitudes and behaviour in relation to increasing their digital media literacy. These are their existing competencies with using digital media and their level of motivation to become more digital media literate.

Their comparatively low level of competencies can be explained by the fact that many of these people have not been required to use technology on a day-to-day basis. As a result, they have not had the chance to familiarise themselves, and experiment, with the internet and/or mobile phones. Findings suggest that having the ability to experiment is a useful, informal means of learning which can often increase a person's confidence.

People's perceived motivation to become more engaged with digital media also affects their attitudes and behaviours. It is an individual's own motivation to want to use the technology that is the key driver to increasing their digital media literacy. For a limited user to start using the technology there had to be a compelling reason for them to want to access the internet or a particular feature on their mobile phone. People had to be able to see that the benefit would outweigh the effort.

Barriers relating to the low usage patterns of digital media
Because of their limited and/or irregular use of digital media, participants in the research had not been able to develop an understanding of the underlying assumptions about how digital media work, or the associated commonplace language that has developed among regular users of this type of technology. This means that low level users tend not to have a broad vision of how the internet works and do not pick up transferable skills. Instead, they learn and memorise individual steps, in a method that is similar to rote learning. In effect, they do not have the ability to apply their learning to new situations.

The research indicated that these transferable skills included the ability to use a search engine, navigate around a website, purchase goods on the internet and use features, such as a camera on a mobile phone. It was also clear that many people did not have a clear understanding of the security measures in place for internet banking as they were extremely hesitant about making these and other transactions online. They were concerned about the security and protection of the personal details and information they would need to provide to make these transactions.

In addition, the lack of comprehension of the basic commonplace language and terminology associated with digital media made it more difficult for them to understand something or remember it.

Attitudinal segmentation
Five attitudinal segments in relation to digital media were identified: 'Resistors', 'Defensive', 'Thirsty', 'Potential Transitioners' and 'Economisers'.

They believed that ‘old fashioned’ ways work well, so questioned the relevance of beginning to use digital media.

‘Resistors’
The ‘Resistors’ had no desire to use digital media and as a result they showed no interest in changing this situation by either purchasing technology or by increasing their interest and confidence in using digital media. They were the most likely to be non-users or extremely limited users of the internet or mobile phones. These individuals strongly rejected the idea of learning and would have actively avoided any situations to learn about digital media.

‘Resistors’ claimed they were making an active choice not to use technology. They believed that ‘old fashioned’ ways work well, so questioned the relevance of beginning to use digital media.

There were very few ‘Resistors’ within the sample. They were more likely to be at the older-family, post-family and recent retirees life stages. With regard to geographical locations, they were more likely to live in regional areas, perhaps because they have less exposure to new technologies. They came from predominantly blue collar backgrounds and were not using technology in their jobs at all.

‘Defensive’
It became clear in the course of the group discussions, as some respondents let their guard down, that there is a group of people who are afraid to admit they would like to learn more about digital media. This group has been termed 'Defensive' in our model.

Essentially they recognised that there is a range of benefits to using technologies, however, they lacked the confidence to admit they did not have the skills to take advantage of these benefits. This group had a limited understanding of the underlying assumptions about how digital media works and the associated commonplace language. They would only use specific websites which they had been shown how to use, and basic calling and texting functions on their mobile phones.

Being surrounded by more digitally competent friends and family appeared to make this segment even more defensive. They claimed it often became too stressful for them to ask for help with technology from their family. Thus, despite having easy access to the internet and mobile phones, their pride, some reluctance to acknowledge their unmet needs, and fear prevent this segment from using these technologies.

This segment comprised a range of ages including individuals who sat within the pre-family, younger-family, older-family and post-family life stages. It tended to include men as opposed to women, and they appeared less prepared to admit to their lack of skills. This segment was more likely to include blue collar workers.

‘Thirsty’
The ‘Thirsty’ had the strongest motivation to learn about digital media. They had begun conducting some activities online but were still being held back to some degree by a lack of understanding of the underlying assumptions about how digital media work, and knowledge of the associated language. They ranged in terms of their current competencies...
from very low through to medium. They were willing to admit they wanted to overcome their fears, such as disrupting other family members’ work, and ‘breaking’ or causing problems on the computer, as well as their fears about internet security, including internet banking and cyber-safety for their children.

The ‘Thirsty’ were more interested in learning about the internet than mobile phones. They were open to learning about a broad range of activities, from using transactional and information websites through to using emails and Skype. However, this segment was more open to learning about advanced mobile phone functions than other segments.

These people may have taken some steps to participate in courses. Several of them had attended training courses within the community such as those at their community college, TAFE, local library or senior citizens group. The majority of people who had attended these had found them helpful, clear and inexpensive. Yet for others, these courses sounded intimidating and they had learnt the basics from friends and family. Some had taught themselves by experimenting with the internet in their spare time. This segment comprised people from the older-families, post-families and retirees life stages. It included males and females, as well as white and blue collar workers.

‘Potential Transitioners’

‘Potential Transitioners’ were people who had taken the first step in using digital media, but only used it when they could see there were clear benefits. They regarded technology as a ‘means to an end’, as opposed to something they use for entertainment or enjoyment, and were reluctant to experiment further. They were only happy to use services they felt comfortable with, such as websites they were familiar with, sending emails or using Skype. They were reluctant to experiment further as they claimed they preferred the traditional methods. This segment also lacked the conceptual understanding of, and knowledge of the commonplace language associated with, digital media.

‘Economisers’

‘Economisers’ were people who had a positive relationship with technology. The costs of acquiring and maintaining digital media were the key factors influencing why this segment was not currently using digital technology. For some people the actual costs were off-putting and they could not afford to purchase particular technologies. For others, purchasing the technology was not a high enough priority for them to justify the costs. It is likely that most ‘Economisers’ will choose to re-engage with digital media when they believe the benefits outweigh the costs or when they have greater disposable income.

Some ‘Economisers’ had access to the internet at work or at their friends’ or families houses. However, they did not regard access to the internet as a necessity. This segment tended to purchase a cheap, basic mobile phone which they only used for essential calls and in emergencies.

Some explained that they preferred text messaging to calling because it was cheaper. They perceived the newer mobile functions, such as sending picture messages and using the internet, as being extremely costly and therefore avoided using these features. The ‘Economisers’ were more likely to be from younger life stages and included those at the pre-family and younger-family life stages. They included a range of people including students, those who had recently moved out of home, single parent families and one-income families. They were more likely to come from blue collar backgrounds.

None of the members of the segments in this study appeared to be making an active choice not to use digital media. The ‘Resistors’ and ‘Defensive’, and to some degree the ‘Potential Transitioners’, claimed to be making an active choice. However, in reality they seemed to be making excuses to cover up their lack of competence. The ‘Thirsty’ were open to admitting they face barriers to further usage, which included their lack of competence, fears and insecurities. The ‘Economisers’ identified costs as the major barrier to digital media usage.
Digital literacy refers to the skills, knowledge and understanding required to use new technology and media to create and share meaning. It involves the functional skills of reading and writing digital texts, for example being able to ‘read’ a website by navigating through hyperlinks and ‘writing’ by uploading digital photos to a social networking site. Digital literacy also refers, however, to the knowledge of how particular communication technologies affect the meanings they convey, and the ability to analyse and evaluate the knowledge available on the web.

It has become commonplace to claim that children are engaging more than ever before with technology and digital media, in forms such as video games, music editing, animation, social networking sites, video sharing, and other different forms of online communication. Young people are therefore often considered to be better equipped than older generations to live and learn in the 21st century, a belief summed up by Marc Prensky (2001) in his description of today’s youth as ‘digital natives’.

Technology certainly creates challenges and opportunities for schools and educators as they seek to apply it to engage young people and assist their learning. Geography teachers, for example, might now be asking how GPS technologies and interactive online mapping applications can be applied in their lessons, and science educators might recognise how interactive visual simulations permit new ways to examine scientific phenomena.

At the same time, it is necessary to examine the digital natives idea more critically. The kinds of new media celebrated in the accounts of informal learning by digital natives are products of the commercial landscape, usually designed for purposes other than education. Young people may not be asking enough questions about the powerful commercial strategies within the media that operate upon them in ever more complex ways.

The concept of digital natives also obscures inequalities in access to technology. The poorest in society are likely to have less access to computers, the internet and meaningful ICT education. A reduced capacity to use a computer effectively is likely to prevent such students from getting many jobs, as well as from participating in a wide variety of government and other services offered online.

The teaching of digital literacy in schools offers a means to address both of these issues: by improving the critical understanding of those who already possess technological skills; and by facilitating the learning of all forms of digital literacy among students who have had limited access to ICT.

Aspects of digital literacy

The literacy needed to engage with the digital environment takes in an integrated repertoire of skills, knowledge and understanding.

Information literacy. During the 1990s the notion of literacy was extended to include the capacity to manage and use information for learning, work and daily life. Young people need to think about what information they can trust and what makes information credible.

Media literacy. At the same time, media literacy experts pointed out the growing role that television, film, advertisements and online media have played in people’s lives over the past half-century. The ways that these media work are not always transparent and both children and adults may find it challenging, for example, to work out who owns and produces particular media and technology, and...
what corporate interests are being represented by them. Media literacy also involves the interpretation and production of shared meanings, and the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts.

**Multiliteracies.** Literacies in contemporary society are multi-dimensional, multimodal and changing, and cannot be understood as one single set of skills. Young people may display high levels of literacy in one medium but less developed levels in another. Effective digital participation requires that students are proficient in various literacies and able to adapt their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills to widely differing modes of communication.

**Critical digital literacy.** Like the term literacy, digital literacy is often used solely to describe functional skills. However, technical skills need to be integrated with skills in critical thinking, and attention to wider issues such as how and why we use computers and how this affects the meaning that we produce and receive.

**Participation in the digital world**

The digital environment offers opportunities to take part in sophisticated civic, social and leisure activities when online. These forms of participation include affiliations with communities such as Facebook or online games; activities in which participants create new forms of expression through zines, fan fiction-writing, or mash-ups; collaborations, where learners work with others to complete tasks or develop knowledge and skills, such as when using Wikipedia or gaming; and activities in which users shape the circulation or flow of media through forms such as podcasting and blogging.

Educators may be interested to consider how well the digital environment encourages students’ participation. It is important that participation is not tokenistic, but rather that students are genuinely empowered and have agency to act through meaningful channels.

Efforts to encourage participation in the digital environment also need to overcome the challenges mentioned earlier: unequal access to opportunities, experiences, skills and knowledge need to be addressed, and students need to understand how media shape perceptions of the world. Digital participation also raises ethical issues: young people need to be prepared for their increasingly public roles as media-makers in the community.

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**The digital environment offers opportunities to take part in sophisticated civic, social and leisure activities when online.**

**Technology in schools**

Despite substantial investment in ICT for school education, issues relating to the quantity, quality and use of technology remain, and have implications for the integration of ICT into the curriculum. Issues include establishing reliable internet connections; keeping equipment up to date; the provision of specific hardware or software required, and access to information about how to use them. These issues suggest the need for continuing investment in technological infrastructure to ensure the most effective use of ICT in schools.

Policies and procedures regarding ICT, and the physical organisation of computers, may also need to be reconsidered. In some schools, the majority of computers are located in ICT suites which are heavily used and can be difficult for teachers to book. Mobile phones and mobile devices are often banned in the classroom even when they may be more effective than the computers provided by schools. Other potential hindrances to developing digital literacy across the curriculum include timetabling restrictions and undue or excessive blocking and filtering of online content.

**Professional learning**

Integrating knowledge of digital technology with the development of subject knowledge is likely to require altered pedagogical techniques, as well as the development of different knowledge, outlooks and skill sets in teachers. However, there are wide variations in the confidence, skills and knowledge that individual teachers themselves possess around digital technology and media. Teachers who remain unfamiliar with technology and online media are unlikely to use it imaginatively for learning purposes. Technology needs to become fully, meaningfully and sustainably integrated throughout the curriculum.

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**Conclusion**

By developing the digital literacy of learners through the curriculum, educators are able to contribute to enhancing learners’ potential for participation in digital media. This means enhancing young people’s ability to use digital media in ways that strengthen their skills, knowledge and understanding as learners, and that heighten their capacities for social, cultural, civic and economic participation in everyday life.

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http://cmslive.curriculum.edu.au
WILL TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME DESTROY YOUR BRAIN?

In this way, your environment will make or break your brain. It will mean you use it, or lose it. Spending all your time in a limited environment will mean you’ll do a great job of maintaining certain connections. Meanwhile, the neglected, unused connections will die and your brainpower will (metaphorically) shrink.

Burying your brain cells

The question now, is which kind of environment has the electronic age created?

“My fear is that these technologies are infantilising the brain into the state of small children,” Greenfield told the UK’s Daily Mail. For her, screen cultures are definitely limiting environments. They’re encouraging normally childish tendencies, like short attention spans, and a sensory focus. They’re leaving us with poor understanding of anything that isn’t literal – metaphors, the idea of something being able to mean something else, will soon become unfamiliar.

The good news is you’re not necessarily stuck with what you’ve got – ‘nurture can trump nature.’ Our brains are malleable, evolving things that will continue to grow and deteriorate all throughout our lives.

Evidence that is strictly scientific is lacking, but this hasn’t deterred Greenfield. She points to behavioural indications, that we’re beginning to see more and more of the behaviour that technology generally encourages. There’s a lot of talk about a rise in diagnoses of ADHD and autism, which may indicate a rise in shorter attention spans and reduced empathy respectively.

The mere existence of TVs, computers and video games haven’t set the fate of our brains in stone. It’s our overexposure to them, and particularly the overexposure of more impressionable minds – the young. As Greenfield put it in the Daily Mail, “It is hard to see how living this way on a daily basis will not result in brains, or rather minds, different from those of previous generations.”

Down with technology?

Undecided? Well, so is the science world. Luckily, amongst all the confusion, the science community has managed to come up with some good TV. For a succinct summary of the counter arguments and to see some good old science sledging, have a look at the ‘Social websites: bad for kids’ brains?’ BBC clip. Careful it doesn’t rewire your brain.

Submitted 9 October 2009 by jsuggate. Updated 2 December 2009

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Is tweeting childish? Are video games society’s downfall? Will your Facebook addiction destroy your brain? Baroness Susan Greenfield tackled the hard questions about the tech effect at Sydney’s Festival of Dangerous Ideas. ActNow was there to catch it

No, the perils of technology is not a new debate. The old drama about TV destroying young, innocent minds has raged on for many years, mutating, growing and lodging itself at the forefront of our parents’ minds. Now it’s not just TV anymore, it’s everything. If it has a screen or a keyboard, hell if it has a power cord, than it’s making you lazier, stupider and for those in the more extreme camp, brainwashed. Generally, I’d say we’re over-reacting. I don’t doubt the modern omnipresence of technology is doing something, but ‘destroy’ isn’t a word to throw around lightly.

As a professor, neuroscientist, author and general overachiever, Baroness Susan Greenfield knows what she’s talking about. She’s about as down as you can be with the inner workings of the brain and when it comes to our minds, she says online networking has got more pull than we realise.

Get to know your brain

As you might expect, talking about the brain tends to get a little science-y. So I’ll do for you now what Susan Greenfield did for me – a quick course in neuroscience that you can hold in higher esteem than Wikipedia.

Your intelligence isn’t based on how many brain cells you have, but how connected they are. The more active your brain, the more connections between brain cells you’ll sprout, and all the better you’ll be for it. What’s connected to what determines your understanding of the world.

The good news is you’re not necessarily stuck with what you’ve got – ‘nurture can trump nature.’ Our brains are malleable, evolving things that will continue to grow and deteriorate all throughout our lives.

So how do you bump up your sprout count? Try something new, and you’ll learn something new, and a teeny weeny little brain connection will be born. A stimulating and diverse environment is your number one brain improvement device, so surround yourself with diverse people, places, experiences and ideas.

Submitted 9 October 2009 by jsuggate. Updated 2 December 2009

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Many people today point to the ‘screen culture’ of Australia’s young people as the source of our childhood obesity crisis. But creative thinkers see it as its possible solution.

The government authorities, health experts and educators who urge parents to get their screen-head kids away from the electronic surfing, chatting and gaming, and replace it with ‘real’ activity instead, may be missing something.

Rather than convincing young people of the merits of conventional exercise and sports, it may be worth promoting fitness and health in, and through, the computer worlds they inhabit.

Today’s children are encouraged to participate in basically the same activities that older generations took part in when they were young: playing in the park, riding bikes, or joining organised sport.

But why should 21st century children have the same interest in these conventional activities when they view them from a technology-charged world?

Modern life is lived within the context of computers, and even more so for children. While ‘digital immigrant’ parents adapt to new technologies in much the same way as an adult learning a second language, their ‘digital native’ offspring have taken up and mastered new technologies with ease.

Rather than convincing young people of the merits of conventional exercise and sports, it may be worth promoting fitness and health in, and through, the computer worlds they inhabit. But let’s think beyond the latest wave of interactive computer games that offer virtual bowling, boxing, dancing and martial arts.

The challenge is to shift computer gaming from merely ‘entertainment’ to a medium for education where all children can access the benefits. Computer simulations have found their way into building design, air-flight training, medicine, real estate and tourism. So why not let our schools play a prominent role in integrating physically interactive computer games and sports into their physical education curriculum to promote fitness and health? Better yet, why not add interactive electronic learning into conventional subjects, such as geography, biology or history?

With the emergence of high quality 3D graphics and animation, interactive tele-immersive virtual environments, and wireless technologies, a classroom in the not-too-distant future may include a laboratory with 30 or 40 stationary bicycles and treadmills, each connected to a computer.

A simulated geography excursion, for example, could be...
other subject areas might invigorate the curriculum and help teachers meet the daily standards set for physical education in government schools.

Who knows, fitness activities introduced as part of the curriculum could carry over into a more active lifestyle outside the school.

Granted, the development of computer games or simulation-based curriculum on a scale that would deliver fitness benefits to improve childhood obesity rates would not be an easy task.

Integrating computer-based fitness activities into other subject areas might invigorate the curriculum and help teachers meet the daily standards set for physical education in government schools.

It would require some innovative partnerships between government and computer game manufacturers in the private sector to provide the infrastructure, software and teacher training before it could become a reality.

But considering the rising health costs of obesity and related diabetes and heart disease, a computer-integrated approach that delivers simultaneous educational outcomes and health benefits is at least worth a good look.

Dennis Hemphill is an Associate Professor in Sport Ethics and the Head of the School of Sport and Exercise Science at Victoria University. He has written on topics such as sport violence, ethics and doping control, cybersport, anti-sexism and anti-homophobia in sport, as well as professional ethics in sport coaching, exercise science, and physical education.

On Line Opinion, posted 4 February 2009
www.onlineopinion.com.au
Internet addiction is when a person has a compulsive need to spend a great deal of time on the internet, to the point where other areas of life (such as relationships, work or health) are allowed to suffer. The person becomes dependent on using the internet and needs to spend more and more time online to achieve the same 'high'.

There is a range of behaviours that can be referred to as internet addiction. Other terms for this addiction include internet addiction disorder (IAD) and net addiction.

Generally speaking, surveys suggest that males who are addicted to spending time online tend to prefer viewing pornographic websites, while females are attracted to chat rooms for making platonic and cybersexual relationships. Some mental health professionals argue that internet addiction isn’t a mental disorder in its own right, but an expression of pre-existing problems such as obsessive-compulsive disorder.

**Medical opinion is divided on whether internet addiction exists as a mental disorder in its own right or whether it’s an expression of pre-existing mental disorders or behavioural problems.**

Any attempts to cut down on internet use results in symptoms of anxiety such as irritability

The user turns to the internet to cope with negative feelings such as guilt, anxiety or depression

The user neglects other areas of life (such as relationships, work, school and leisure pursuits) in favour of spending time on the internet

The user is prepared to lose relationships, jobs or other important things in favour of the internet.

**Different types of addiction**

The categories of internet addiction include:

- **Sex** – the person uses the internet to look at, download or swap pornography or to engage in casual cybersex with other users. This results in neglect of their real-world sex life with their partner or spouse

- **Relationships** – the person uses chatrooms to form online relationships at the expense of spending time with real-life family and friends. This could include having online affairs ('cyberadultery')

- **Games** – this can include spending excessive amounts of time playing games, gambling, shopping or...
trading. This can lead to severe financial troubles

➤➤ Information – the user obsessively searches for and collects information.

A range of theories
The actual cause is unknown. The current range of theories for compulsive internet use includes:
➤➤ Personality issues – the user may have personality issues that make them likely to become dependent on a range of things – such as cigarettes, alcohol, gambling, other drugs or the internet – given the right circumstances
➤➤ Shyness – people who are shy in real-life situations may be drawn to the anonymity of the internet and believe they can be their ‘true selves’ when online
➤➤ Biochemical responses – the person’s brain responds to the online rewards with ‘feel good’ chemicals and this biochemical ‘high’ encourages dependence
➤➤ Escapism – the internet is so absorbing that the user can forget about their problems or escape negative emotions while online. Because it makes them feel better, it encourages them to turn to the internet more and more for relief
➤➤ Instant gratification – search engines help users find what they want quickly – for example information, gambling opportunities or pornography. This instant gratification encourages them to stay online.

Self-help suggestions
If you think you may be addicted to the internet and you want to change your behaviour, you could try the following strategies:
➤➤ Take note of your symptoms – for example, keep track of your behaviour, thoughts and feelings
➤➤ Think about why you use the internet so much. What makes you go online? Is there a real problem you’re not facing up to?
➤➤ Brainstorm (think about) other ways to cope with your problem that don’t involve the internet. Choose some that will work and put them into practice

It isn’t necessary to quit using the internet altogether. Professional treatment aims to allow the person to use the internet positively rather than compulsively.

➤➤ Use relaxation methods like deep breathing or meditation to manage anxiety symptoms
➤➤ Rediscover the neglected areas of your life – for example, socialise with friends, make love to your partner, take your children to the beach, get out and be active
➤➤ Seek professional help if necessary.

Professional treatment
It isn’t necessary to quit using the internet altogether. Professional treatment aims to allow the person to use the internet positively rather than compulsively. Internet addiction seems to respond well to cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).

This type of therapy focuses on changing patterns of thinking and beliefs that are associated with, and trigger, anxiety. The basis of cognitive behaviour therapy is that beliefs trigger thoughts, which then trigger feelings and produce behaviours. Consult with your doctor for further information and referral.

Where to get help
➤➤ Your doctor
➤➤ Psychologist
➤➤ Australian Psychological Society
Tel. (03) 8662 3300 or 1800 333 497.

Things to remember
➤➤ Internet addiction is an umbrella term that refers to the compulsive need to spend a great deal of time on the internet, to the point where relationships, work and health are allowed to suffer
➤➤ Medical opinion is divided on whether internet addiction exists as a mental disorder in its own right
➤➤ Professional treatment, which may include cognitive behaviour therapy, aims to allow the person to use the internet properly rather than compulsively.

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Chapter 2

Social media

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN GETTING SMARTER ABOUT ONLINE RISKS

Children and young people have a high level of awareness of cybersafety risks and the key messages for staying safe online, according to a report from the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

The report, *Click and Connect – Young Australians’ Use of Online Social Media*, found that 75 per cent of children surveyed claim they know not to give out their address or phone number online and remember key safety messages such as ‘people aren’t always who they say they are online’.

“Australian children are telling us the internet is part of their everyday lives, and as they approach high school, it’s increasingly important to their social lives. Up to 97 per cent of 16 to 17 year olds claim to use at least one social networking service,” said Chris Chapman, Chairman of the ACMA.

Most young people are using online technologies as a way to connect with their real world friends, with a small proportion – 17 per cent of 12 to 17-year olds – using online social networking to build networks of new friends.

“Australian children demonstrate a good general knowledge of online behaviours that we might consider ‘risky’ – they know what not to do. Up to 78 per cent of parents also report having a ‘high’ level of knowledge of online risks,” Mr Chapman said.

Importantly, the report highlights an ongoing need for cybersafety material that resonates with young people, as well as an improved flow of cybersafety information to parents.

“The ACMA cybersafety programs such as Cybersmart Detectives and internet safety presentations for parents, are on track to meet the information needs identified in the report,” said Mr Chapman.

Report findings will inform development of the new ACMA cybersafety materials, including a new cybersafety website due for release soon. Reports of the quantitative and qualitative study are available on the ACMA’s website.

BACKGROUNDER

From June to November 2008, the ACMA commissioned qualitative and quantitative research to gain up-to-date insights into issues currently facing young people online, including their understanding and experiences of online risks and ways they manage those risks.

The *Click and Connect – Young Australians’ Use of Online Social Media* reports will help shape safety messages and materials for children, young people, teachers and parents as part of the ACMA’s national cybersafety program.

The research comprised of a qualitative study and a quantitative survey of over 800 parents and their children aged 8 to 17 years.

KEY FINDINGS

General internet use

- As children age they spend more time online.
  - Children aged eight to nine years use the internet for an average of one hour, six minutes every two days.
  - Young people aged 16 to 17 years average three hours, 30 minutes on the internet every day.
- Younger children are more interested in individual activities online, such as playing games – 83 per cent
of eight to 11 year-olds reported online gaming as the most popular use of the internet.

By comparison, young people aged 12 to 17 use the internet mainly for social interaction – 81 per cent of 12 to 17 year olds nominated social networking services as their main reason for going online.

**Social networking services**

Social networking services refer to online services where ‘members’ can chat with each other via instant messaging, email, video or voice chat, share photos and videos and post comments in online forums or blogs.

Young people, aged 12 to 17, have a very high level of use of social networking services.
- Approximately 97 per cent of 16 to 17 year-olds surveyed reported using at least one of these services, compared to 51 per cent of children aged eight to 11 years.
- Fifty-four per cent of 12 to 17-year olds claim that ‘chatting to friends from school’ is their main reason for using social networking services.
- By comparison, only 17 per cent of 12 to 17 year-olds claim to use the internet to ‘make new friends’.

**Awareness of risks associated with use of internet and social networking services**

Children and young people have a high awareness of cybersafety risks and identify activities such as ‘posting personal information’ as high risk behaviour.

The tendency toward risky behaviour rises with age. Of those aged 16 to 17 years:
- Sixty-one per cent report accepting ‘friend requests’ from people they don’t know offline.
- Seventy-eight per cent claim to have personal information, such as a photograph of themselves, on their social networking profile pages, compared to 48 per cent of eight to nine year-olds.

**Parents’ knowledge of cybersafety risks, and communication with children**

Parents report communicating ‘frequently’ with their children about internet use and the risks associated with stranger contact.

As children age, parents report less active monitoring of their internet use.

Outside of their parents, children are likely to go to their siblings to discuss cybersafety issues. Young people aged 12 to 17 years are most likely to go to another friend for advice.

Parents claim a relatively high knowledge of their children’s behaviour online, especially when their child is among the younger age groups.

**Cyberbullying**

The experience of cyberbullying increases with age. Cyberbullying is experienced by just one per cent of eight to nine year-olds, but 19 per cent of 16 to 17-year olds surveyed.
- Seventy-two per cent of those surveyed told their parents about the bullying.
- Fifty per cent knew how to block the bully’s messages.
- Less than 10 per cent of children and young people surveyed admitted any involvement in cyberbullying another person.

**ACMA’S CYBERSAFETY INITIATIVES**

The ACMA is responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, the internet, radiocommunications and telecommunications. The ACMA provides a comprehensive national program of cybersafety initiatives as part of the Australian Government’s cybersafety policy.

The ACMA’s program includes researching current trends in cybersafety, undertaking targeted information and awareness-raising campaigns and activities, and developing cybersafety education materials for use in schools and at home.

Activities include:

- Developing cybersafety education materials for use in schools and at home. These programs are designed for children from 5-15 years and include CyberQuoll, CyberNetrix, Cybersmart Detectives and Wise up to IT.
- The Cybersafety Outreach program of Professional Development for Educators and general awareness presentations for parents, teachers and children.
- Researching current trends in cybersafety and young people’s use of online media.
- The Cybersafety Contact Centre offering callers information and advice about internet safety issues and concerns. Telephone 1800 880 176.
- Undertaking targeted information and awareness-raising campaigns and activities, such as Safer Internet Day in February 2009.
FACEBOOK’S A JUNGLE, BUT KIDS CAN COPE

Facebook’s popularity with children has led to concerns they are getting caught up in a sinister world they are not ready for. Gemma Breen from ABC News reports

But an expert says the social networking site, if used under supervision, can be a normal part of a young person’s social life.

The site claims to have more than 400 million users worldwide. If it was a country, only China and India would be bigger.

And Facebook’s reach not only extends to adolescents, young adults, colleagues or parents. Despite its privacy settings stipulating that anyone who signs up must be at least 13 years of age, many younger kids are jumping online and starting up a profile of their own.

Linda Caple-Wakeling from New South Wales allows her 11- and 13-year-old children to use Facebook. But she says she logs on every day to check what friends they have, as well as their messages. “They only have people from school on [Facebook] and I’m the one that OKs the friend requests,” she said. She says all of their friends have Facebook accounts – including some five-year-olds.

Associate Professor Virginia Slaughter, an expert on children’s social development at the University of Queensland, says Facebook simply gives kids another avenue besides face-to-face interaction for doing what they would be doing anyway – socialising.

She says a report released late last year compared adolescents’ Facebook identities to their real-life social identities. The results were surprising.

“There was this idea that maybe if you can’t make it in real life, then you retreat to Facebook ... but that doesn’t seem to be the case,” she said.

“If you had a lot of friends in real life, you had a lot of Facebook friends. All it does is give them more opportunities to engage socially.

“I can’t imagine that the effects [of Facebook] on young children would be all that different to what’s going on with teenagers.”

Faux friends warning

The latest Facebook advice comes after the recent death of 18-year-old Nona Belomesoff, who met her alleged killer through the social networking site.

Her body was found in a creek bed in Sydney’s south-west and police have charged a 20-year-old man with her murder.

On Monday, police from child safety and sexual crime taskforce Argos warned parents about the dangers of children divulging their personal details on Facebook.

“There is no reason a teen or child should have a photo on their Facebook profile page,” Detective Superintendent Peter Crawford said earlier this week.

“If you use social networking as a closed networking with friends that you know ... then the risks are very much reduced,” he added.

Associate Professor Slaughter does not go that far, but she says without supervision, kids can open themselves up to real online dangers. “Obviously you can’t just say, ‘Facebook’s fine, let them go’. They do need to be supervised. They do need to understand the risks,” she said.

She says parents have to constantly warn their children about the dangers, including the trend of building up Facebook friend lists.

“[They think] the more friends you have, the more popular you are, the better you are. This leads children to accept friendships from people they don’t know just so they can gather numbers,” she said.

“That lets potentially someone unsavoury into their lives.

“They get a lot of third and fourth-person invitations to be friends, and you really don’t know who you’re dealing with.”

Jason Wilson, a lecturer in digital communications at the University of Wollongong, says it is unrealistic to ask children to remove their photos from Facebook.

“I think it’s probably a bit too strong a reaction to something that’s happened that’s very tragic, but is after all a pretty rare event,” he said.

“Rather than talking about restricting people from these services, which I don’t think is realistic, we need to think about educating people perhaps about the importance of protecting their information more effectively.”

He says many parents find it difficult to understand and navigate the settings.

“I think particularly for kids ... matters of privacy probably aren’t first and foremost in their minds,” he said.

“I think Facebook would do us all a service if they made their privacy settings clearer.”
When they hear that I don’t have a Facebook account or a Twitter page, some people look at me as if I’ve just announced that I want no part of some fundamental convention of society. It’s the same reaction that I would get if I told them that I don’t own a pair of underpants or a toothbrush. They look at me like I am some sort of commando-going, halitosis-suffering maniac who must be stopped for the sake of all mankind.

An exponentially growing number of people are defined by their social media presence. Not that there’s anything wrong with that, but these are the people that are utterly gobsmacked by someone who works in the media and avoids online communities like the plague.

My resistance to participating in social media was not due to a lack of understanding. I’m not some confused senior citizen sitting alone in their unit, convinced that Twitter is a misspelling of the style of laughter induced by the Benny Hill show in the late 1970s.

Social media is a voice for the public in the new age and provides a low-cost, accessible platform for self-expression and communication.

As a producer and publicist, I work with these sites daily. In fact, a number of clients pay me to develop and manage their social media presence. I know a post from a tweet, a fan from a friend. My resistance was due to a healthy fear that resulted from being all too familiar with the platform.

Think about all the information you volunteer about yourself on these sites. Not just your name, age and where you live, but the results of all those amusing little ‘which Twilight cast member are you most like?’ personality tests, details of your private life and all sorts of other titbits of information about who you are, what you do and where you spend your time. All this information is held by a private company. It sends shivers down my spine. Knowledge is power and social media giants have too much of it about too many of us.

Tribute pages to deceased children are being defaced with pornography, employers use the revelations from social media pages to fire employees and cyberbullying destroys lives across the world. Now more than ever it seems that there are good reasons to steer clear of spreading your business.
all over some profit-motivated social site.

Many of my friends admired my philosophy of social media non-participation, all the while posting on their Facebook walls and retweeting the ramblings of their favourite celebrities. I was like a Hare Krishna, practicing a religion that everyone is sure is full of nice ideas, but no one wants any part of due to the social outcast factor.

But for a number of reasons, the time has now come for me to stop swimming against the tide. Instead of raising my middle finger to Facebook and Twitter, I will raise my index finger to my mouse and click ‘sign up’.

So why now? Why suddenly decide to log on and get my tweets out with the best of them?

A couple of weeks ago a cousin of mine visited from the UK. Merry was made, photos were taken and a few days after she returned home she uploaded the images to her Facebook page.

“Seen the photos?” my girlfriend asks me one day.

No, I haven’t seen the photos, because I’m not on Facebook.

“I saw your photos,” said my friend, who met my cousin once a decade ago. They now chat regularly on Facebook, whereas I see her once in a blue moon.

Do you see the problem?

I enjoy interacting with people and have come to realise that the opportunities for connecting and communication that social media offers outweigh my issues, which, let’s face it, are bordering on paranoia anyway.

There are also professional reasons to participate. I’m trying to kick off a writing career and need to get my name floating around. I’ve just started my own blog and I want people to read it. Avoiding social media would put me at a disadvantage regarding both these goals in a very meaningful way. As with all tools, social media is not inherently good or bad. The choice to use it productively or destructively lies with us.

Social media has the potential to unite people across borders, races and religions. It is a voice for the public in the new age ...

Digital cameras have been used to capture child pornography. Do we criticise the digital camera? Of course not, we buy them by the bucket load. We criticise the person who takes the photo and commits the crime, not the tool they use to do it.

The same should be true of social media when social degenerates post sicko material on social media tribute pages, or when the platform is used destructively in any other way. Social media has the potential to unite people across borders, races and religions. It is a voice for the public in the new age and provides a low-cost, accessible platform for self-expression and communication.

So perhaps I don’t need to hang my head quite so low for jumping on board the social media bandwagon and representing another notch on the bedpost for Facebook and Twitter.

Of course this story cannot end without the inevitable catchcry of the social media newbie: please add me, I want to get lots of friends.


Source: The Punch | www.thepunch.com.au
Social media can take many different forms, including internet forums, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and video links. Names you may be familiar with include ‘Facebook’, ‘MySpace’, ‘YouTube’ and ‘Twitter’. There are also many other forms of online communication operated via providers such as ‘Microsoft’, ‘Google’ and ‘iPhone’.

There are many more modes of communication than there were even 10 years ago, and most of these forums are made accessible (and free) via the internet. And as the internet has been made increasingly available through wireless technology and mobile phones, we never have to be without it.

So what does all this mean for young people and parents? Adolescence is a time of life when peer communication is not just valued, but a priority. Parents may recall having long phone conversations with their own school friends, even after seeing them all day. This connection is part of a young person’s developmental needs.

It’s the same with young people now – except there are many more ways to keep in touch. Mobile phones, email, texting and webcams are all ways that young people maintain contact.

The difference is that social media allows a young person to have contact with more than one person at once. This lends an element of fun and excitement to communicating in this way. Adolescents may want to be part of their friendship ‘group’ by meeting online as well as at school. Social media also give young people an opportunity to be creative, get feedback from friends, or keep updated on events in each other’s lives.

**SAFETY ISSUES**

Because many social media are relatively new, concerns exist in the community about content, safety, and security. Who owns what? And where do things go once they are put online?

All of these websites, if properly managed, will have information about privacy, options for reporting concerns, and information for parents.

Internet users should keep in mind that once an image or statement is uploaded, it is accessible to others. By law the person uploading content must state they have the right to do so, but this doesn’t mean they can always control who sees what.

Whilst forums like ‘Facebook’ ask people to be ‘friends’ in order to access another’s personal information, there are various levels of privacy settings. And often it can be tempting to accept an offer of friendship from someone unknown, especially for young people who feel isolated or alone.

**CYBERBULLYING**

Cyberbullying is any bullying that is carried out through technology such as the internet or mobile phones. This can include:

➤ Abusive, threatening or harassing texts or images sent by mobile phone
➤ Abusive, threatening or harassing emails, either written individually or forwarded to a group
➤ Forwarding malicious content from websites
➤ Verbal bullying or exclusion in chatrooms.

Cyberbullying has its own specific impacts because of the accessibility of communication forums – it can take place 24/7 and sometimes it may feel there is no escape.

It can also reach a wider audience, as comments can be directed at many people at the same time. Written words
and/or pictures can be permanent and accessible to others. Cyberbullying can be more secretive and less easily detected, as it does not involve face-to-face contact. It can also be anonymous.

**SEXTING AND VIDEO IMAGES**

Sexting is the sending of sexual images via mobile phone.

Some adolescents may choose to send photos of themselves or others which can be considered sexual by their friends. These photos may be suggestive or sexually explicit, and involve full or partial nudity.

At times these friends pass these photos onto others. This may happen for many reasons – as a joke, trying to help friends ‘hook up’, or because of arguments.

Sexting is a very real concern for parents as:

➤ Adolescents may not think of the images as sexual. Therefore they may not always be aware of the risks associated with sharing these photos
➤ It isn’t always easy for adolescents to think through the consequences of sharing the photos (e.g. they may not think about what happens to the photo once it has been sent)

**SOME STRATEGIES FOR CYBERBULLYING**

➤ Don’t reply to the bully
➤ Save the text, images or the website
➤ Block and delete the bully
➤ Keep a record including the time and date of the incident
➤ Make a report to your mobile or internet service provider, or to the website management (e.g. ‘Facebook’)
➤ Encourage your child to talk to someone they trust should this occur – parents, teachers or other responsible adults
➤ Consider contacting the police in severe or ongoing cases
➤ Check out our information sheet on cyberbullying for more ideas.

**TIPS TO STAY SAFE ONLINE**

➤ Keep usernames and passwords secret
➤ Ensure security questions are difficult to guess. Install filters on computers
➤ Help your teenager to understand risks associated with disclosing their name, home address, or other personal details (including pictures) that might make them identifiable
➤ Only put friends they know (and preferably that you know) on their contact/friend lists
➤ Encourage young people not to respond should someone make inappropriate comments or make them uncomfortable. Leave the site and report the incident
➤ Before uploading a comment or sending a message, think twice about the content; misunderstandings can occur more easily because there are no non-verbal cues in online communication
➤ Educate yourself about what young people do online – learn what it’s all about and be interested
➤ Remember to pay attention to other areas of a young person’s life and how they are doing. Discuss any concerns in a way that is meaningful rather than appearing too critical.

**SOME HELPFUL WEBSITES**

www.netalert.gov.au
www.reachout.com.au

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

www.cybersmart.gov.au
www.schools.nsw.edu.au/click
www.community.nsw.gov.au

Remember that young people view technology in a very different way to their parents. Nowadays it is much more acceptable to share information and pictures; in fact this is regarded as normal communication.

Talk with your teenager about:

➤ What sort of photos they take of themselves, or let others take of them. Let your teenager know they don’t have to take photos of themselves (or others), especially if this makes them feel uncomfortable
➤ Personal boundaries – what information they think is okay to share (and with whom) and what information is personal. This applies to any information shared on social networking sites
➤ Sharing photos of themselves and others. Sharing photos always requires the consent of the person involved. Let them know they should only share photos that they would be happy for other adults (including parents) to see.

Remember that it is normal for teenagers to be uncertain about sexual issues and sexuality. They may also be experiencing peer pressure, or be feeling isolated from friends.

A conversation about sexting should therefore be seen as part of the bigger discussions on personal safety and boundaries.
Social media is revolutionising internet communications and for people with disabilities this new phenomenon has the potential to remove many of the barriers faced when socialising and networking. Rachel Mulholland discusses

However, there are still many access issues facing disabled users. So, is social media becoming a tool for social inclusion, or simply creating new barriers?

Social media like Twitter and Skype can be said to be the consumer phenomenon of 2009. This new form of communication has taken a foothold in every major market around the world, and Australia is no exception. The March 2009 Nielsen report Global Faces and Networked Places reveals more than one in every two Australians uses social networking sites.

For people with disabilities, numbering one in five Australians, access to these sites can be life-changing. Alex Varley, CEO of Media Access Australia, a not-for-profit organisation devoted to promoting access to media for people with disabilities, says, “Social media are the cornerstones of modern communication and it is essential that people with disabilities, who can become socially isolated, are able to use these tools and stay connected with the world.”

Before the arrival of social media technology Glenda Watson Hyatt, who lives with severe cerebral palsy, was unable to converse with most people unless, as she says, they could understand ‘Glenda-ish’. Glenda now runs an eloquent blog, allowing her voice to be heard clearly and highlighting the difference between the way people with disabilities are perceived in the real world and through social media.

On her Do It Myself Blog, Glenda writes “Social media gives voices to individuals marginalised and ignored by traditional media, enabling the world to hear these voices for the first time in history.”

Mark Scott from the ABC recently described social media as the modern-day ‘town square’. Glenda’s Do It Myself Blog, shows how this town square has the potential to be truly inclusive, representing able-bodied citizens as well as those with disabilities, unlike the town square of old.

However, the Social Media Accessibility Review released this week by Media Access Australia (MAA) has found many social media websites are not making the grade for accessibility. Large numbers of people with disabilities, including those with physical disability, vision loss or hearing loss, are facing exclusion from this increasingly important ‘town square’ where we conduct business and social relationships.

According to the report, which reviewed the accessibility of popular social media websites, Twitter has great potential for people with disabilities, but currently has many accessibility pitfalls. This website has failed to list any formal accessibility policy and has never spoken about accessible developments in its official blog. The links for replying to a tweet, making a tweet a favourite, and deleting a tweet can only be activated when the user hovers the mouse over a tweet. There are no commands for deleting tweets or direct messages, excluding many people with physical disabilities.

Also, the registration for Twitter makes use of a CAPTCHA, which is a visual verification device. There is an audio option, but the link is particularly small making it difficult for users with vision impairment to access the service. Other problems occur when users attempt to resize the text because Twitter has text resizing locked, again hindering access for the vision impaired.

Martin Cahill, New Media Coordinator at Media Access Australia, who has been working on the review, says:

“When I think about social media I tend to think about social spaces. Think about your local park, for example, and everyone you expect to see there. People walking their dog, mothers picnicking with their children, grandfathers feeding the ducks, and teenage romance blossoming under the apple tree. What you don’t expect to see is a gate that restricts entrance to those with a vision, hearing or physical impairment. The park is open to all. Social media should be no different, and as it gradually usurps the social function played by the park, coffee house or the town square – the gate must be open to all.”

A lack of accessibility features on social media is inadvertently imposing a ‘technological lock-out’ on those people who arguably have most to gain from social networking and instead of promoting inclusion these new social spaces are creating more barriers to social inclusion. As social media sites begin to eclipse older communication methods like face-to-face meetings or using the telephone, it is vital that all people, including those with disabilities, are included and can benefit.

Rachel Mulholland works for Media Access Australia, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to finding technological solutions for media access issues faced by people who have vision and/or hearing impairment.

On Line Opinion, posted 22 December 2009
www.onlineopinion.com.au
Social media accessibility

Social media is an increasingly important aspect of modern life for people with disabilities. Media Access Australia rates the accessibility of the most popular social media services

Social media allows anyone with an internet connection to publish their digital content, including articles, photographs, music and videos to the web. Social media is an increasingly important aspect of modern life. We all have a place in the network and a role to play. We should all be able to share photographs, important debates, notices and conversations that extend across our workplace, charitable interests and personal lives.

The Social Media Accessibility Review aims to improve understanding of accessible design and raise awareness of good practice across the largest social media players. For Version 1.0 of this report Media Access Australia has considered six of the most popular social media services according to a number of statistical measures.

Media Access Australia has ranked the following services in order of accessibility:

1. Facebook: Facebook has made great efforts to include a wealth of accessibility features and is a good choice for people with disabilities
2. Skype: Skype has delivered an accessible product, but they must be conscious that new versions maintain the good work done to date
3. YouTube: YouTube has put a lot of work into the accessibility features of their site and this has been backed by a recently launched centralised accessibility portal offered by Google, YouTube’s owners
4. Flickr: Flickr is only somewhat accessible. It still has some way to go before the site will be open to all users, but the launch of an accessible lab shows promise
5. Twitter: Twitter has grown rapidly over a short period of time and the site has fallen short of introducing a number of easy to install accessibility features
6. MySpace: MySpace is an inaccessible site. It has failed to deliver an accessibility policy and has no evidence of accessible design built into the service.

The review suggests that if a site is accessible it is typically successful. Media Access Australia predicts that in such a competitive market accessibility will become central to the development of social media businesses.

Media Access Australia has published a number of tips and tricks to help vision, hearing and physically impaired users to access popular social media websites including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Please visit Media Access Australia/New Media for more details.
Are there any privacy risks associated with using social networking sites?

Yes. Like many activities on the web, there are some privacy risks. You can minimise the risks by taking steps to protect your personal information online. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner explains

PROTECTING INFORMATION ONLINE

Here are some of the things you should think about when using social networking sites. They are not meant to scare you, just help you to be prepared.

➤➤ Don’t be under any illusions – it’s not just your close friends listening in!
➤➤ Are you sure you want that information to be public?
➤➤ Remember that activities online affect your life offline
➤➤ Protected your own privacy? ... what about your friends?
➤➤ Watch out for identity theft.

Don’t be under any illusions – it’s not just your close friends listening in!

Sometimes it can feel like your MySpace page is like an online diary and the only people reading it are your close friends. Not true!

Think carefully about the information you post. Would you be comfortable with your teacher, uni lecturer, employer, parents or a police officer reading the information you post?

Are you sure you want that information to be public?

Be careful about what sort of information you post on social networking sites.

You have probably seen some of those media reports where people have applied for a job and found that their MySpace or Facebook page has let them down. Others have actually lost their jobs due to comments they have made about their employer on MySpace or Facebook.

Remember that comments you post on social networking sites are mostly public. So, think carefully about what information you publish about yourself.

If you have a message for a particular friend, consider sending it to their inbox rather than posting it publicly on their wall.

Remember that activities online affect your life offline

Imagine you are planning a party and post the details on your MySpace page including your address. On the day, strangers show up uninvited, gatecrash the party and vandalise your house.

This is an extreme example but it does happen!

A more common example is if you are part of a social group on MySpace or Facebook. If the group meets regularly or attends certain events, your membership of this group may allow people you don’t know to find you.

When you are online on MySpace or Facebook, it can feel a bit like these sites are a world away from your real, physical life at home. Not true!

These different worlds aren’t as far apart as you think. When you give out information about yourself online, you make it easier for people online to find you offline.

So, think carefully about who you want knowing where you live, what your phone number is, or which school you go to.

Protected your own privacy? ... what about your friends?

So you’ve been careful to protect your own privacy, but what about the privacy of other people? When you use a social networking site, the privacy of your friends and family is in your hands. Are they comfortable with (or do they even know about) the information you are revealing about them on your MySpace page?

Remember that comments you post on social networking sites are mostly public.

So, think carefully about what information you publish about yourself.

A risk with social networking sites is that people lose control over their personal information – people who might not even use the site.

Think carefully about what you’re going to post about others. Try putting yourself in their shoes. Maybe it’d be a good idea to ask your friend before you post that information or photo.

Remember that others have a right (like you) to control how information about them is made public.

Watch out for identity theft

Identity theft occurs when someone steals information about you, often so that they can steal money from you.

For example, if someone gets enough personal information about you, they may be able to apply for a credit card or a loan in your name. After they’ve taken off with the money, the ‘real’ you is left with the bill and the bad credit rating.

Identity theft doesn’t always have to involve money. Your MySpace or Facebook account details and password could be stolen by an identity thief who then logs onto your profile, vandalises your page and sends messages to your friends pretending to be you.

You make it easier for identity thieves when you make lots of information about yourself public.
People who use the internet and mobile phones have larger and more diverse social networks, according to a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project

Washington – Contrary to popular belief, technology is not leading to social isolation and Americans who use the internet and mobile phones have larger and more diverse social networks, according to a new study.

“All the evidence points in one direction,” said Keith Hampton, lead author of the report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. “People’s social worlds are enhanced by new communication technologies.

“It is a mistake to believe that internet use and mobile phones plunge people into a spiral of isolation,” said Hampton, an assistant professor of communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

The authors said key findings of the study – Social Isolation and New Technology – “challenge previous research and commonplace fears about the harmful social impact of new technology.”

“There is a tendency by critics to blame technology first when social change occurs,” Hampton said. “This is the first research that actually explores the connection between technology use and social isolation and we find the opposite.

The diversity of people’s core networks tends to be 25 per cent larger for mobile phone users, 15 per cent larger for basic internet users, and even larger for frequent internet users ...

“It turns out that those who use the internet and mobile phones have notable social advantages,” Hampton said. “People use the technology to stay in touch and share information in ways that keep them socially active and connected to their communities.”

The study found that six per cent of Americans can be described as socially isolated – lacking anyone to discuss important matters with or who they consider to be ‘especially significant’ in their life.

That figure has hardly changed since 1985, it said.

The study examined people’s discussion networks – those with whom they discuss important matters – and core networks – their closest and most significant confidants.

It found that on average, the size of people’s discussion networks is 12 per cent larger among mobile phone users, nine per cent larger for those who share photos online, and nine per cent bigger for those who use instant messaging.

The diversity of people’s core networks tends to be 25 per cent larger for mobile phone users, 15 per cent larger for basic internet users, and even larger for frequent internet users, those who use instant messaging, and those who share digital photos online.

At the same time, the study found that Americans’ discussion networks have shrunk by about one-third since 1985 and have become less diverse because they contain fewer non-family members.

The study found that on average in a typical year, people have in-person contact with their core network ties on about 210 days.

They have mobile-phone contact on 195 days of the year, landline phone contact on 125 days and text-messaging contact on the mobile phone 125 days.

They have email contact on 72 days, instant messaging contact on 55 days, contact via social networking websites on 39 days and contact via letters or cards on eight days.

The study involved telephone interviews with 2,512 adults between July 9, 2008 and August 10, 2008 and has a sampling error of 2.1 per cent.

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When explaining how communication technologies shape society, eccentric Canadian communications theorist Marshall McLuhan would often equate people to fish. A fish doesn’t realise what effect water has on its life, he’d say, because a fish is completely surrounded by water, and in much the same way people don’t understand the effect different communication mediums have on their lives because they are so immersed in them.

So, if you’re willing, why don’t you step out of the pond with me to examine how the fastest growing, and arguably most prevalent communications medium in the world, the internet, is affecting the way the members of the first internet generation (hey that’s us) form relationships.

Phone calls are passé. Letter writing is now confined to octogenarians and people making ransom notes. Being in the same room and talking to someone face-to-face, pffft who needs it? I know I certainly don’t when I have emails, Skype, IMing, tweeting, MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Flickr, chat rooms, message boards (and if I had way too much time, Farmville).

There are masses of ways for us to communicate online and virtual socialising is now a significant part in our lives. According to the report, Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8 to 18-Year-Olds the average US child spends seven hours and 38 minutes on the net each day. Granted not all of this time is spent on social media, but it would be safe to assume a fair portion of it would be.

So it’s no surprise that electronic relationships are becoming more prevalent. In fact, they are becoming so common that some people are concerned that they may be undermining real world interaction. Vincent Nichols, the UK’s head of the Catholic Church recently told an English newspaper that because of social media, “as a society we’re losing some of the ability to build interpersonal communication that’s necessary for living together and building a community.”

Is such a pessimistic view necessary? Not according to a University of Sydney study that found no correlation between time spent online and high levels of anxiety and depression. Participants in the study even reported that they thought time on the net benefited them psychologically. So, perhaps it’s more apt to think of online communication as adding another dimension to our physical social lives, rather than replacing them.

... the net is changing the way we form relationships but really it is just what we of make it. The internet can enhance our social lives or it can ruin them but essentially it’s just a tool.

When my sister and her friends use the internet they certainly demonstrate this. They use the net to talk to other acquaintances, view the Facebook pages of friends-of-friends, and so on. They are using the net as a tool to strengthen existing social networks. So if the net is strengthening the relationships of these girls that already have an active social life what can it do for those who don’t?

A study by Tom R Tyler of New York University suggests that the extremely shy benefit from online relationships. For extreme introverts online interaction is often seen as being less stressful than real world communication. In this way a shy individual can utilise the net to create new relationships or strengthen existing ones which in turn will improve their everyday face-to-face interactions.

The internet can also be a gateway to the outside world for those that are unable to have offline interactions. For example, the Anglican Cathedral of Second Life is a virtual cathedral in the online world of Second Life that provides religious support and social interactions for those who are sick or infirm or simply unable to make it to regular church services.

Claims that the internet is creating a dystopian society where we are confined to our desks constantly updating our Facebook status need to be examined. Yes the net is changing the way we form relationships but really it is just what we of make it. The internet can enhance our social lives or it can ruin them but essentially it’s just a tool. In many cases the net is strengthening our social lives and even creating relationships that would not have existed otherwise. So go out and tweet the world with your inane tweets, but remember seeing people face-to-face is OK too.

HOW I KNOW THIS?

Submitted 24 March 2010 by dannmiller
Updated 6 April 2010
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Chapter 3

Online safety

The internet: benefits, dangers and strategies

Most children at some stage will use the internet. Many parents can feel they are being left behind or are out of their depth compared to their children in grappling with the internet. As with other areas of children’s lives, parents have a responsibility to provide guidance and to set clear limits. This topic is aimed to assist parents in this task. The Australian Council on Children and the Media provides some facts

WHAT IS THE INTERNET?

The internet is a massive network of computers from around the world all connected by cable and satellite. When users are connected to the internet, they can receive text, images, video and sound on their computer from computers anywhere in the world. Just as there is a book or magazine on nearly every subject in local libraries, bookshops or newsagents, so is there information on virtually every subject on the internet. The internet is sometimes called the world wide web (www) or just ‘the net’.

BENEFITS OF THE INTERNET

The internet can provide children and adults alike with a world of exciting opportunities. It offers:

➤ Educational games and programs
➤ Research information for school projects and business
➤ The opportunity to communicate with people from all around the world
➤ The opportunity to share resources and ideas with people that have the same interests
➤ Shopping around the world without leaving your computer.

The internet uses multimedia and interactivity extensively. Using multimedia means that you can access not only written words, but also pictures, music and sound effects. Interactivity means that the user can choose what they want to see just by the click of a mouse. The computer ‘asks’ users questions which they can then answer.

ONLINE DANGERS FOR CHILDREN

There are no regulations or controls on the material that is placed on the internet. While there are over 3 million perfectly safe children’s sites on the net, children can unexpectedly come across material of a sexual or violent nature, language that is rude and the advertising of children’s products. Quite innocently they can bring up sites that do not relate to the topic they are looking for, or someone can send them images or messages that are not appropriate. Therefore there are many things online that are not suitable for children or that are cause for concern.

The main dangers to children are that they may:

➤ Access inappropriate information
➤ Inadvertently form ‘friendships’ with strangers
➤ Become victims of cyberbullying
➤ Be subjected to advertising pressures
➤ Risk their personal health through excessive use
➤ Endanger their privacy by revealing personal details about themselves, such as their name and address.

Access inappropriate information

The search engines on the internet provide access to many sites on a given topic. Even when children are searching for ordinary everyday topics, it is possible that they might come across sites with information and/or images that could be harmful to them.
Sexually explicit material
➤ This could include graphic pictures and videos intended for adults
➤ Exposure to graphic pornography can cause emotional distress to children
➤ If you become aware of any child pornography online, note any relevant details and report the matter to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). For more details see the section below – ‘Lodge complaints’.

Violent and disturbing images
➤ This could include such things as crash scenes and even mortuary sites
➤ Research has shown that violence in any form of screen media, that is, films, videos, television, computer games and the internet, can have a negative effect on children, particularly young children
➤ For more information about the impact of media violence, see related topics on the Australia Council on Children and the Media website or call the Children and Media Australia Helpline on 1800 700 357.

Making purchases or gambling online
➤ Children can easily come across sites which encourage them to purchase goods online
➤ Online gambling. A credit card number is all it takes for someone to ‘play’
➤ Using 1900 numbers. Children can inadvertently accumulate very large telephone bills in a short space of time by accessing Internet Dialer numbers that transfer them to an overseas phone line.

Incorrect and inaccurate information
➤ Children may believe that everything they see on the internet is factual
➤ In fact, any person can put any information they like up on the internet and there is no guarantee that the information is accurate.

Inadvertently form ‘friendships’ with strangers
It is possible that children will come into contact with people who are pretending to be children but have other motives.
➤ There is a real danger that children may:
  ➤ Come into contact with paedophiles
  ➤ Provide personal details to strangers
  ➤ Arrange to meet friends they have made on the internet without really knowing who they are
  ➤ Be harassed by email.

Become victims of cyberbullying
Cyberbullying is the use of online or mobile technology to harass or intimidate another person. Teasing, false rumours, false messages and threats can be spread by email, in chatrooms, blogs, forums and mobile phone messages. Bullying can be done by groups or individuals who are able to remain anonymous.

Be subjected to advertising pressures
Once on the internet, children are likely to be subjected to unsolicited advertising. This could take the form of pop-up advertisements or ads embedded into particular websites. Such advertising often has bright colourful images and catchy phrases designed to put pressure on children to purchase goods online. A term for unsolicited advertising on the internet, the equivalent of junk mail in your letter box, is ‘spam’.

Risk their personal health through excessive use
The internet can become addictive. It is important that children do not use the internet to the exclusion of other developmentally appropriate tasks including, the need to be physically active.

Endanger their privacy
Some sites encourage children to join clubs and enter competitions. In so doing, they reveal their name and address and may become the target of unwelcome marketing and other material.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO
There are several things that you can do to help counteract the dangers of the internet while allowing your children to use its benefits:
➤ Learn more about it yourself
➤ Be aware of what your children are doing on the internet
➤ Establish guidelines about safe internet use
➤ Teach your children to be critical users of the internet
➤ Put in place reasonable boundaries
➤ Use blocking software or filters
➤ If necessary, lodge complaints.

Learn more about it yourself
The more you know about the internet, the more support you will be able to provide your children. Many local libraries, schools and other community groups offer free courses or courses at reasonable prices. Don’t forget, your children may be the best teaching resource you have – sit with them and ask them to help you understand. You don’t have to become an expert, but some degree of comfort with the technology will help.

Be aware of what your children are doing on the internet
You can do this in a number of ways, including sitting with them while they are using the internet and chatting with them about what they are doing.

You can also keep track of what is going on by:
➤ Checking Bookmarks or Favorites (accessible via the icons on the menu bar) for sites your children like to visit often
➤ Checking recently visited sites (using Options, Preference or History)
➤ Email monitoring software is also available. KidSafe is an example of email monitoring software. It allows parents to filter email for their children to block out
Establish guidelines about safe internet use
There are several practical steps you can take to safeguard what happens in your home in respect of the internet:
➤ Keep the computer that is connected to the internet in a family area, not behind closed doors
➤ Only allow your children to use chat groups or newsgroups or send email messages with your permission and under your supervision
➤ Talk to your children’s school about their online policy; you may be able to put their safeguards into practice at home
➤ Select a reliable service provider and discuss children’s online safety with them.

Teach children to be critical users of the internet
One of the best ways of protecting your children is to teach them to be critical users of the internet. Teach your children:
➤ Never to give others their name, the names of their friends, or fill in questionnaires with their personal details
➤ Never to send images of themselves over the net as they may be used for other purposes
➤ About ‘stranger danger’ as it applies to the internet. If a child or young adult wishes to meet new online ‘friends’ in person, make sure you supervise the meeting
➤ Never to respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, or threatening. Encourage your children to report such experiences to you. If they do, discuss these matters calmly with your child and forward a copy of any such messages to your service provider, asking for assistance
➤ To only use monitored chat lines designed for their own age group
➤ To always be themselves when online
➤ To be critical in respect of ‘information’ found on the internet. Information on the internet comes from many sources and not all is reliable.

Use blocking software or filters
Blocking software or filters are the names used for programs that you can install and use on your computer to control the information that is accessed by children whilst on the internet. Blocking software:
➤ Can block or minimise the risks of harmful violent material, sexually explicit material and chat lines being displayed on your computer
➤ Is inexpensive and available from most computer suppliers or straight from the provider’s sites.

Whilst blocking software is an excellent idea for some age groups it is not foolproof and some computer aware children can still get around these programs. Blocking software goes hand in hand with parental supervision and is no substitute for it.

Put in place reasonable boundaries
Discuss with your children what you consider to be reasonable boundaries on use of the internet. Depending on the age of your child, negotiate these boundaries with them.

For example: Set a daily or weekly time limit. The amount of time you decide upon will depend on the age and developmental stage of your child. Remember that the internet can be addictive and that you may need to encourage your child to keep a balance with other activities, including being physically active. Only allow internet access in public spaces so that you can keep an eye on what they are accessing and discuss it with them if necessary.

Make it clear to them what materials are unacceptable
Make rules about online shopping, downloading material, responding to unsolicited advertisements and so on.

Lodge complaints
If you think you or your child have come across something illegal on the internet, you can lodge a complaint with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). ACMA has the oversight of internet content matters, and will investigate complaints referred to it in relation to specific web sites.

For information about how to complain to ACMA, call (02) 9334 7700, or visit their website, www.acma.gov.au.

Following the links on this page you can submit a complaint, either:
➤ Online, or
➤ By completing ACMA’s Complaint about website content form and submitting it by email, or
➤ In your own words to online@acma.gov.au, or
➤ In writing either by completing ACMA’s Complaint about website content form and printing it, or writing a letter in your own words.

Letters or completed forms can be posted to: The Content Assessment Hotline Manager, ACMA, PO Box Q500, Queen Victoria Building, NSW 1230 or faxed to (02) 9334 7799.

ACMA will investigate, and if it is found that the material is illegal, and the site is hosted in Australia, ACMA can issue a ‘take down’ notice to the relevant Internet Service Provider, requiring them to remove the website.

If the site is hosted overseas, and is prohibited, or is likely to be prohibited, ACMA will notify the suppliers of approved filters to take action in accordance with the Internet Industry Association (IIA) Code of Practice.

The Australian Council on Children and the Media Help-line, website and small screen are supported by a grant from the Government of South Australia.
We have openly welcomed the internet into our lives. For most of us the internet is part of our daily routine for keeping in touch with friends, family, working, studying, shopping and paying bills.

While the internet offers us many benefits, there are also a range of safety and security risks associated with its use. These include threats to the integrity of our identity, privacy and the security of our financial transactions, as well as exposure to offensive and illegal content.

Whether you are new to using the internet or a regular user – here are six simple tips you can take to help protect yourself online:

1. Install security software and update it regularly
2. Turn on automatic updates so all your software receives the latest fixes
3. Set a strong password and change it at least twice a year
4. Stop and think before you click on links or attachments
5. Stop and think before you share any personal or financial information – about you, your friends or family
6. Know what your children are doing online – make sure they know how to stay safe and encourage them to report anything suspicious.

What these tips show is that protecting yourself online is about more than just how you set up and use your computer or mobile phone. It’s also about being smart in what you do and the choices you make while using the internet.

There are criminals who use the anonymity of the internet to run old and new scams. Many of these are scams that most people would spot a mile away if they were attempted in ‘real life’.

So it’s important to remember that while the technology may be new, the old wisdom still applies. If something you see online seems suspicious or too good to be true, it probably is.
it’s important to remember that while the technology may be new, the old wisdom still applies. If something you see online seems suspicious or too good to be true, it probably is.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

**CYBER SECURITY**

**CYBER SAFETY**
- cybersecurity@acma.gov.au or phone 1800 880 176.
- www.netalert.gov.au or phone 1800 880 176.

**IDENTITY SECURITY**

**OFFENSIVE CONTENT**

An extract from the booklet Protecting Yourself Online – What Everyone Needs to Know, published by the Australian Government

**SOCIAL NETWORKING SAFELY**
- Set your profile to private
- Protect your accounts with strong passwords
- Use discretion when accepting ‘friends’
- Never click on suspicious links – even if they are from your friends
- Don’t post information that would make you or your family vulnerable, such as your date of birth and address
- Don’t post photos of you or your family and friends that may be inappropriate – or that your family and friends haven’t agreed to being posted.

**DEALING WITH OFFENSIVE CONTENT**
- Take note of the website address
- Make a complaint to the ACMA.

**PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN ONLINE**
- Install and maintain a content filter on your computer or use parental controls on your security software
- For young children, set up your computer to only access approved websites and email addresses
- Monitor where your children go online
- Educate your children not to share personal information online

Report cyberbullying to your child’s school and your ISP
Remind your children to never meet someone in person who they have met online unless a responsible adult is also present
Tell your children that if they are uncomfortable talking to you they can contact the Cybersmart Online Helpline (Kids Helpline) at www.cybersmart.gov.au
Report suspicious behaviour to your local police or Crime Stoppers by phoning 1800 333 000.

The booklet Protecting Yourself Online – What Everyone Needs to Know offers further information and advice. It will help you secure your computer, be smart online and be safe online.

The booklet is available online at: www.ag.gov.au/cybersecurity and www.staysmartonline.gov.au

Extract from Protecting Yourself Online – What Everyone Needs to Know booklet

Stay Smart Online | www.staysmartonline.gov.au
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ISP filtering is a key component of the Australian Government’s cyber-safety plan. Filtering of online material at the ISP level reflects the view that ISPs should take some responsibility for enabling the blocking of such content on the internet.

This consistent with the recent child online protection guidelines issued by the International Telecommunications Union. The guidelines state that the strategic objective for the internet industry for child internet safety should be to reduce the availability of, and restrict access to, harmful or illegal content and conduct.

ISP-level content filtering is already occurring in other countries, including Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The Government wants to ensure a similar level of protection for internet users in Australia.

... the strategic objective for the internet industry for child internet safety should be to reduce the availability of, and restrict access to, harmful or illegal content and conduct.

ISP-LEVEL FILTERING OF REFUSED CLASSIFICATION MATERIAL

The Government has announced that it will introduce legislative amendments to require all ISPs in Australia to use ISP-level filtering to block overseas hosted Refused Classification (RC) material on the ACMA RC Content list.

Content defined under the National Classification Scheme as Refused Classification includes child sexual abuse imagery, bestiality, sexual violence, detailed instruction in crime, violence or drug use and/or material that advocates the doing of a terrorist act.

The RC Content list will be based on public complaints to the ACMA and assessed using existing criteria set out in the National Classification Scheme. The ACMA will also liaise with highly reputable overseas organisations to identify lists of child abuse material suitable for incorporation into the RC Content list, following a detailed assessment by the ACMA of the processes used to compile those lists.

REVIEW OF REFUSED CLASSIFICATION CATEGORY

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, recently announced a review of the Refused Classification category under the National Classification Scheme.

The review will be conducted by the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Brendan O’Connor, in cooperation with relevant State and Territory Ministers. The review will examine the current scope of the existing RC classification, and assess whether it adequately reflects community standards. As the Government’s mandatory ISP filtering policy is underpinned by the strength of the classification system, the mandatory filtering legislation will not be introduced until the review is completed.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

The Minister has announced a comprehensive suite of transparency and accountability measures to accompany the introduction of ISP-level filtering.
This suite of measures is based upon the outcomes from recent public consultations on options for transparency and accountability measures relating to the placement of material on a list for filtering.

**AGREEMENT TO VOLUNTARY FILTERING OF CHILD ABUSE MATERIAL**

While the review of the RC classification proceeds, Australian users would still have access to content that has been classified as RC, including child abuse material which most people would agree is content that should not be available on the internet. Telstra, Optus and Primus have agreed to voluntarily filter a list of child abuse URLs compiled and maintained by the ACMA.

In line with the Government’s mandatory filtering policy, URLs of child abuse imagery obtained from lists maintained by highly reputable overseas agencies will also be placed on the ACMA list for voluntary filtering, following a detailed assessment by the ACMA of the processes used to compile those lists. As far as practicable, the agreed suite of transparency and accountability measures for the mandatory filtering policy will also apply to the voluntary filtering of child abuse material. The Government will also consider legislation to provide ISPs protection from civil action where they are voluntarily filtering child abuse material.

Other Australian ISPs are encouraged to follow the example of these ISPs, as well as the large number of ISPs in other western democracies that filter this content.

**ADDITIONAL FILTERING**

The Government has also announced it will establish a program to encourage ISPs to offer additional ISP-level filtering services on a commercial basis to assist parents to provide a safer online environment for their children, including from inadvertently accessing harmful online material such as potential X18+ and gambling sites.

ISP-level filters can enable parents to choose from a broad range of categories of content they wish to filter without having to download or configure software on their personal computers.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

The Department has provided answers to a number of frequently asked questions in relation to the Government’s plans for the introduction of ISP-level filtering.

**ARE YOU AN ISP SEEKING FURTHER INFORMATION?**

The Government is committed to continue working closely with the internet industry in relation to the implementation of ISP-level filtering. If you are an ISP seeking further information on the technical aspects of filtering, register your details with the Department via the online form.

**ISP FILTERING PILOT**

As part of its plan to examine the introduction of ISP-level filtering, the Government conducted a live ISP filtering pilot in 2009 that provided valuable information on the effectiveness and efficiency of filters installed in ‘real world’ ISP networks.

The live pilot, managed by independent testing laboratory Enex TestLab, demonstrated that filtering of a defined list of online content can achieve 100 per cent accuracy and no noticeable performance degradation directly attributable to the filter.

Enex TestLab has provided its report of findings from the ISP filtering pilot.
Government puts internet filter on backburner

The Federal Government has deferred the introduction of its mandatory internet filtering program. ABC News reports

Communications Minister Senator Stephen Conroy says the filter will not be put in place until an independent review can be carried out into what content would be banned. The review, which Senator Conroy says is likely to take about a year, will look at what makes up ‘refused classification’ rated content.

The refused classification rating includes child sexual abuse imagery, bestiality, sexual violence, detailed instruction in crime, violence or drug use and material that advocates a terrorist act.

Senator Conroy says internet service providers Telstra, Optus and Primus have agreed to block websites known to contain child pornography in the meantime.

“I applaud these industry members for taking this stance, for stepping up to the plate, in recognition that there is some content that is not acceptable in a civil society,” he said.

“This approach is consistent with what is happening around the world.” The Government announced the filter two years ago as part of its cyber safety program to protect children from pornography and offensive material. Last year it ran tests on the system.

Senator Conroy had intended to introduce the legislation in the first half of this year, but deferred it to later in 2010.

He says the refused classification rating, according to the national classification scheme, includes child sexual abuse imagery, bestiality, sexual violence, detailed instruction in crime, violence or drug use and material that advocates a terrorist act.

“Under Australia’s existing classification regulations this material is not available in newsagencies; it is not on library shelves. You cannot watch it on a DVD or at the cinema and it is not shown on television,” Senator Conroy said.

“Under laws passed by the previous government, refused classification material is not available on Australian hosted websites.

“Unfortunately where this content is hosted overseas nothing can be done to remove it.” Some of the grey areas of internet censorship include images of crimes taking place, graffiti or stencil art, and what some people would refer to as sexual fetishes. The plan has been criticised by internet users who claim it will slow download speeds and lead to unwarranted censorship.

Senator Conroy has not yet announced who will conduct the independent review.

SingTel Optus’ head of corporate and government affairs, Maha Crishnapillai, says the Attorney-General should decide what should be on the refused classification list. But he says Optus expects transparency on how the blocked URLs come to be on the list.

“The problem we have is international sites and so the only way we can deal with that is to block those and I suspect all of our customers want us to block child pornography sites,” he said.

The plan has been criticised by internet users who claim it will slow download speeds and lead to unwarranted censorship.

“One of the reasons we have said we want to step up and offer this voluntarily is that we think there are ways that the industry [can] cooperate to do that without the need for the mandatory legislation. However ... if legislation is required we will quite happily work with Government on that.”
In recent years the stereotype of the trenchcoat-clad paedophile who lurks around public parks armed with lollies and other enticing sweets has been replaced by the equally cliched image of the internet-addicted paedophile who trolls chatrooms looking for vulnerable children.

There is no question that sexual predators use the internet to groom potential victims. There is also no question that paedophiles are using the internet to network and to share resources as well as the hideous tips and techniques they use. But when talking to young people about online interactions, it is important that we keep in mind the fact that the most frequent unwanted sexual advances made against young people online, are actually being made by their peers.

As adults we often dismiss such advances as being harmless sexual socialisation and flirtation. But there is no reason to assume that it is easier for young people to negotiate and deflect the unwanted advances made by peers compared to those made by strangers – no matter how calculating those strangers are. It is also problematic to assume that those advances are not experienced as intimidating and coercive, simply because they are being made by their peers.

On the contrary knowing how to negotiate a sexual advance made by a peer or a friend may be far more difficult than telling a complete stranger to back off. Fear of rejection, fear of ostracism within peer networks, and fear of appearing prudish make it very difficult for young people to navigate the complex social dynamics that frame their online lives.

While it’s important that we remain vigilant about adult sexual offenders then, it is also important that we acknowledge the wide range of experiences that young people have, and that we do not ignore certain behaviours simply because those behaviours don’t conform to our stereotyped views of what sexual offences look like.

It is also important that we don’t demonise the internet. For young people everywhere online communication and social networking sites form an important part of social identity construction and it’s not realistic to simply ban children from connecting and communicating online.

The answer, as usual, is that we should talk with young people, listen to their concerns and allow them the space to think through and reflect on their own experiences. Navigating internet traffic and sexual encounters is never easy, but that’s precisely why we need to start young by arming children and teens with as much age-appropriate information as possible. Most importantly, it’s vital that hysteria and panic is replaced by education and reasoned discussion.

*Nina Funnell is a media researcher at the University of New South Wales.*

Source: The Age, 20 April 2010

www.theage.com.au

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Would somebody please not think of the children. At least not while we are discussing internet censorship. This may sound like an odd request given that, historically, almost all censorship debates have pivoted around children and the need to protect them. But moral panics and fear-mongering campaigns concerning ‘the helpless children’ often muddy what could otherwise be rational, evidenced-based debates.

And there is no easier way to get an otherwise progressive, reasonable parent to endorse an illogical, anti-democratic censorship regime than by appealing to (and exploiting) their deep-seated fears concerning their children.

But here’s the thing. Censorship debates over child safety have little to do with actual flesh and blood children. If they did then they would acknowledge and include the voices and views of young people and they would recognise the competencies and strengths that children bring to online interactions. After all, while children may be vulnerable to certain elements of the internet, they are typically more digitally savvy than the rest of us, precisely because they have grown up with the World Wide Web.

But conservative moralisers rarely acknowledge this. Instead they tend to hinge their arguments on the patronising, victimised view of children as inherently vulnerable and corruptible. Even worse, by using the figure of the innocent child as a political pawn to advance their own agenda, conservatives are guilty of exploiting children.

And when you think about it, it is a cunning move because anyone who disagrees with the censorship plan is instantly cast as being anti-child welfare, or worse, pro-paedophilia. But this only silences and skews debate.

As someone who lobbies fiercely for the rights of survivors of sexual assault and young people in general, I can say that the best way to protect children is to stop talking about them as though they are vulnerable Oliver Twist-type caricatures awaiting corruption by the big bad world. Instead, we should start talking with our children and empowering them by building on their strengths and by providing them with practical tools to negotiate the online world. And here is the sad reality. The proposed censorship plan is instantly cast as being anti-child welfare, or worse, pro-paedophilia. But this only silences and skews debate.

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Similarly most of the illegal pornographic content on the internet is actually being transmitted through decentralised, peer-to-peer networks and these networks will continue to operate irrespective of the proposed filter.

In short, Senator Conroy’s proposed censorship plan is not going to succeed in what it has been designed to achieve. It will be an expensive, unpopular mistake. It is important, though, that we continue to have conversations about children, pornography and unwanted sexual advances.

In recent years the stereotype of the trenchcoat-clad paedophile who lurks around public parks armed with lollies and other enticing sweets has been replaced by the equally cliched image of the internet-addicted paedophile who trolls chatrooms looking for vulnerable children.

There is no question that sexual predators use the internet to groom potential victims. There is also no question that paedophiles are using the internet to network and to share resources as well as the hideous tips and techniques they use. But when talking to young people about online interactions, it is important that we keep in mind the fact that the most frequent unwanted sexual advances made against young people online, are actually being made by their peers.

As adults we often dismiss such advances as being harmless sexual socialisation and flirtation. But there is no reason to assume that it is easier for young people to negotiate and deflect the unwanted advances made by peers compared to those made by strangers – no matter how calculating those strangers are. It is also problematic to assume that those advances are not experienced as intimidating and coercive, simply because they are being made by their peers.

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It is also important that we don’t demonise the internet. For young people everywhere online communication and social networking sites form an important part of social identity construction and it’s not realistic to simply ban children from connecting and communicating online.

The answer, as usual, is that we should talk with young people, listen to their concerns and allow them the space to think through and reflect on their own experiences. Navigating internet traffic and sexual encounters is never easy, but that’s precisely why we need to start young by arming children and teens with as much age-appropriate information as possible. Most importantly, it’s vital that hysteria and panic is replaced by education and reasoned discussion.

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Source: The Age, 20 April 2010

www.theage.com.au
SAFE SOCIAL NETWORKING

While most people who use social networking sites are well intentioned, you need to be careful about the information that you share and how you protect it.

People can inadvertently or intentionally use your information to embarrass you or damage your reputation, or to even steal your identity. Some useful information from Stay Smart Online

Social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and Linkedin are used to stay in touch with friends, make new friends or business connections and to share information and opinions about topics we’re interested in.

You need to think about how much information you provide and to whom.

Top tips
➢ Always type your social networking website address into your browser
➢ Never use the same password that you use for your bank or email accounts. Have a different password for each social networking site so that if one password is stolen, not all of your accounts will be at risk
➢ Don’t automatically click on links in ‘friend request’ emails you receive. Genuine friend requests will appear on your home page on your social networking site
➢ Be careful about how much personal information you post online. Use privacy settings to control who has access to your information
➢ Be careful about the amount of information that you reveal to people you don’t know. It is easy to create a fake profile online and people are not always who they say they are
➢ Stop and think before you write a message or post pictures. Ask yourself if the information you are sharing is something you want your future employers, friends or family to see. Even items you delete can remain on the internet for years.

On this page
➢ Check the sites’ privacy policies
➢ Be careful how much personal information you post or share online
➢ Be careful about sharing your opinion online
➢ Be wary of strangers
➢ Watch out for phishing emails
➢ Other steps to protect yourself when social networking.

Be careful about how much personal information you post online. Use privacy settings to control who has access to your information.

Fact sheets and resources
Smart behaviours to protect your personal and financial information – watch our video on protecting your personal and financial information. A text transcript is also available. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner provides additional resources about protecting your privacy on the internet.

Check the sites’ privacy policies
Read the website privacy policy before you sign up.
Legitimate social networking sites will have a privacy statement which tells you how they collect and use your information and when and how they might disclose this information either through the website or to third parties.

➢ Some sites may share information such as email addresses or user preferences with businesses, which could send you spam
➢ Locate the sites’ policies for handling referrals to make sure that you do not accidentally sign your friends up for spam
➢ Privacy policies can change. In some cases these sites may notify you of changes. In many cases by continuing to access or use the Services after those changes

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become effective, you agree to be bound by the revised privacy policy. If not you should regularly review privacy policies and review how much information you reveal in your profile.

➤ If you use applications or sign up for games inside the website remember to read the individual privacy policy. Don’t assume that they will have the same policy as the parent website. Some online games are set up to utilise the ‘networking’ aspects of the site and specifically state that they can use you information and your friend’s information in whatever way they like.

**Be careful how much personal information you post or share online**

Once information is online, it is not easy to remove it completely. Even if you remove information from your profile, saved or cached versions may still exist on other computers.

➤ Adjust your privacy settings to control the amount and type of information you want to share, so that people you don’t know very well can only see certain parts of your profile.

➤ The photos, comments, messages and wall posts that you share could be seen by anyone, and are not always removable if you change your mind. This includes information in your profile, on blogs and other forums. People often forget that people other than their friends might see the information.

➤ Often when you apply for a job, companies may check to see if you have an online profile. Be aware that the photos and information you share with your friends may not be what you want you prospective employer to see.

➤ Do not post information that would make you or your family vulnerable (e.g. your date of birth, address, information about your daily routine or holiday plans). This information can be used by criminals to commit identity theft. Users who share addresses, telephone numbers, birthdays, and other personal information put themselves at a greater risk for identity theft, stalking and harassment. This includes information you may post on your wall or someone else’s.

**Be careful about sharing your opinion online**

Be careful about what you say about others online. Posting something rude, offensive or derogatory about another person or business in a public forum can have consequences. Once you post a comment it can be difficult to remove all record of it. Comments you make may be used as legal evidence.

**Be wary of strangers**

People are not always who they say they are.

➤ It is a good idea to limit the number of people you accept as friends.

➤ If you are ‘friends’ with people you do not know, be careful about the amount of information that you reveal and don’t agree to meet them in person.

➤ Use your social networking site’s privacy settings to limit their access to your information.

**Be careful about what you say about others online. Posting something rude, offensive or derogatory about another person or business in a public forum can have consequences.**

**Watch out for phishing emails**

Emails pretending to be friend requests from social networking sites try to direct people to fake versions of these websites. These fake websites may contain malicious software that could steal your personal information and infect your computer.

To help protect yourself from phishing emails:

➤ Never click on links in emails, even if they look genuine, and

➤ Always type your social networking website address into your browser.

Any genuine friend requests will appear on your home page on your social networking site.

**Other steps to protect yourself when social networking**

➤ Protect your accounts with strong, unique passwords. Never use the same password that you use for your email account. This reduces the chances of a hacker or even your friends logging in to your account without your permission. Have a different password for each social networking site so that if one password is stolen, not all of your accounts will be at risk.

➤ Never click suspicious links – even if they appear to be from your friends. Their accounts could have been infected with viruses or other malicious software. If you click the links that they post on your profile page or send in messages, your computer and account could become infected by malicious software too.

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Stay Smart Online | www.staysmartonline.gov.au
Last updated 3 June 2010
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This report presents the findings of research conducted by TNS Social Research on behalf of the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) into adult Australians’ attitudes towards the use of personal information in the context of digital media and communications consumption.

The role of the ACMA includes the provision of information and advice to the community about communication matters and administration of a range of consumer protection measures.

Australian adults’ use of personal information in this context appears as a new priority issue for research, with this research being undertaken in order to further the ACMA’s understanding of adult Australians’ behaviours and attitudes in providing, sharing and protecting personal information when using digital media and communications.

In total eight focus groups were conducted between April 16 and May 4, 2009. Each focus group ran for approximately two hours in duration and included (on average) seven participants.

KEY FINDINGS

Research participants universally interpreted the term ‘digital media and communications’ to mean ‘online activity’ or ‘interaction via the internet’. Only limited use was made by research participants of advanced mobile technologies such as web-enabled phones – many noted that although they could access the web via their mobile phones, they chose not to. More widespread usage of mobile technologies was seemingly limited by cost barriers, lack of perceived need, connectivity issues and general unfamiliarity with operation of mobile devices in this context; rather than being due to any associated security concerns.

‘Personal information’ was seen to encompass anything and everything that could be used to identify an individual, or that could be used as a means of obtaining knowledge that an individual considers to be ‘private’.

Personal information can be classified broadly as ‘hard’ information and ‘soft’ information. Hard information (which participants thought was more sensitive) is linked to identifying an individual, or is in some way unique to an individual, whereas soft information (which participants thought was less sensitive) more generally describes an individual.

The type of, and level to which, personal information is disclosed is seen to be within an individual’s control and a matter of personal choice.

In using digital media and communications participants accept that they will, by the very nature of their activity, be sharing personal information. Many participants expressed an accepting or a resigned attitude towards their ability to protect their personal information online, a consequence of the widespread perception that breaches are inevitable.

The type of, and level to which, personal information is disclosed is seen to be within an individual’s control and a matter of personal choice.

More specifically, the decision to disclose personal information is based on an assessment of the benefits that
will be afforded by the disclosure of such information, versus the risk inherent in such information being disclosed.

The instances in which adult Australians choose to divulge personal information can be broadly categorised into two key areas:

1. **Transactional provision**, with the provision of such information being necessary to obtain a good or service that the individual requires
2. **Networking or social disclosure** whereby information is disclosed by an individual within an online community in order to share and exchange opinions, beliefs and details of activities.

The types of risks associated with personal information being used in a way contrary to the intent for which it was provided include:

- Risks to **personal safety and wellbeing**, or the safety of others (and in particular children)
- Risk of **identity theft**
- Risk of **financial loss**/fraud/theft (could include malicious software)
- Risk of **damage to reputation**
- Risk of an **invasion of privacy**, (access to personal information without permission)
- Risk of exposure to **unwanted communications** (spam or push marketing).

Consideration of the inherent risk associated with each adverse outcome is a factor of the perceived likelihood of the outcome occurring versus the severity of the consequences that would result if such an adverse outcome was to occur.

The research also identified a number of factors or attitudes influencing perceptions of risk:

- Belief that privacy breaches are inevitable
- Distinction between online transactions and interpersonal interactions
- Generational differences
- Risk as a trade off for convenience
- Unspecified (and in some cases irrational or unjustified) fear
- Magnitude of the perceived risk.

In terms of risk avoidance, a number of strategies were reported by participants, and can broadly be categorised as active and passive risk mitigation strategies. Active strategies involve an individual making deliberate decisions and active choices in their online behaviour that assist in protecting the security of their personal information.

These strategies include:

- Password management
- Managing email addresses and spam
- Judicious use of credit cards or the use of alternative pay methods
- Managing information shared on social networking sites.

Passive strategies relate to an individual’s reliance on the software platforms or the security systems of providers to protect an individual’s personal information. Trust is placed in the integrity of these systems to the extent that they are seen as being sufficient to protect the personal information of the individual.

Passive strategies also include reliance upon password management being dictated by the protocols of the site with which the individual wishes to interact.

Responsibility for the safeguarding or protection of personal information is considered to be multi-layered, with the individual, the ISP, the online entity and the government all having a role to fulfil.

Although there is widespread knowledge as to what constitutes effective risk management strategies across a range of circumstances, there are nonetheless several areas where it has been identified that adult Australians have a limited understanding of how to best protect personal information in these contexts, or alternatively are not aware that there is a need for caution to be exercised.
These situations include:
➤ End user licensing agreements
➤ Location being revealed by a mobile device
➤ Bluetooth networking
➤ Biometrics.

In terms of how adult Australians have developed their risk management knowledge and minimisation strategies, this education has typically been informal and largely gleaned through discussions with families and friends, in general, and through consultation with that family member or friend known to be the ‘IT expert’, in particular.

Such knowledge is also being learnt in schools and the workplace, and is being transferred back into the home, particularly in relation to file protection and password management. There is scope for the ACMA to explore these backdoor channels as effective means to distribute empowering information.

Responsibility for the safeguarding or protection of personal information is considered to be multi-layered, with the individual, the ISP, the online entity and the government all having a role to fulfil. There was a general consensus among participants that the first line of defence in the protection of personal information is at the individual level.

Australians feel themselves to be relatively well informed as to how to protect their personal information online. This is undercut by a number of factors which will need to be addressed if online security is to be improved in real terms.

These factors include:
➤ A pervasive belief among adult Australians that security breaches are inevitable, leading to some complacency in adopting appropriate risk management strategies
➤ The sheer pace of technological change makes it difficult to stay up to date with new technologies and platforms, and protected from the latest risks.

Consequently, there is a danger that anxieties stemming from these two factors can discourage full and open participation in the digital environment by some groups and hinder their social inclusion.

Research findings suggest that Australians are learning about protecting their personal information in largely informal ways. They indicate that they see a role for government education. The challenge for government is to utilise the full range of communication channels – including unorthodox channels such as workplaces or via schools – to educate adult Australians. In this way, government can augment the informal learning that is currently occurring, and in so doing, counter the fatalism that is currently undermining Australian’s efforts to manage the risks they face in the digital environment.
Mobilise your phone privacy: top tips

Increase your phone privacy and security to give yourself peace of mind with these steps from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

We use mobile phones for many things: to make calls, send messages and emails, listen to music, store calendar appointments, take photos, pay for things, get directions and access the web. It is easy to forget how much personal information is stored on your phone and just how easy it is to leave your phone unattended or open to theft. Here are some steps to increase your phone privacy and security to give yourself peace of mind.

1. Know where your phone is

It sounds obvious but you’d be surprised at how many phones are lost or stolen each year. Treat your phone like your wallet – know where it is at all times and don’t leave it unattended. Not only does loss or theft mean that your personal information is vulnerable, it may also mean that a thief might run up a large phone bill.

2. Turn on your security features

All phones have security settings so familiarise yourself with them and turn them on. On most phones, you can find security settings under the general ‘settings’ part of your phone’s main menu.

3. Set a password or PIN

To protect your personal information, set your phone to ask for a password or PIN each time you use it. This is the best way of safeguarding your phone if lost or stolen. It can also help stop anyone else from tampering with it. Using a PIN on your SIM card will prevent thieves from stealing your phone credit or running up your phone bill.

4. Report your lost or stolen phone

Every phone has a unique International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number. Most phones will display their IMEI if you key in *#06#*. If your phone is lost or stolen, you can ask your network provider to block your IMEI to prevent others using your phone.

5. Turn off Bluetooth and GPS when you are not using them

Not only are Bluetooth and GPS a drain on your battery, they can also sometimes allow others to see the location of your phone. Bluetooth can also be used to transmit viruses and intercept data. Although Bluetooth and GPS are useful tools with great benefits, it is a good idea to turn them off when you don’t need them.

6. Think before you click

Be careful when opening multimedia messages (MMS), attachments in emails, and clicking links in emails and text messages. Messages and attachments may contain viruses and links which can send you to dodgy websites containing malware that might infect your phone. Make sure you only click links and attachments if you are expecting them, or if they are from a trusted source.

7. Check for software updates regularly

Install software updates to your phone as soon as they become available. Updates correct errors in phone operating systems and often address security vulnerabilities. It is also a good idea to back up the data on your phone before you update, in case anything gets lost. It is important to remember your phone is only as secure as the network and hardware you sync it with, so make sure they are up-to-date too.

8. Be careful of the wireless (Wi-Fi) networks you use

Use secure Wi-Fi networks that require passwords where possible. Do not conduct sensitive transactions such as banking or transactions involving sensitive passwords on public wireless networks – save these for when you are using a secure network. Set your phone to ask you before connecting to a new Wi-Fi network. Remember, even secure networks can have risks, so think before you click.

9. Don’t save passwords or PINs as contacts in your phone

With all the PINs and passwords we have to remember, it is tempting to save them in your phone as fake contacts in case you forget them. Resist the temptation. You may feel like you have cleverly disguised the number or password, but this is the first place a thief will look. You would be surprised at how easy it can be to figure out.

10. Permanently delete all data from your phone when you throw it away

It is important to delete all data from your phone before giving it away, throwing it away, selling it, recycling it, or returning a faulty phone. It is not as easy as you might think to delete data from your phone. Often when you delete messages and files they are not permanently erased. To fully wipe your phone, you will need to follow the manufacturer’s instructions and make sure you remove your SIM card as well as any inserted memory card from your phone.

For more information about mobile phones and privacy, visit www.privacy.gov.au/topics/technologies.

For more information about securing mobile phones and using public wireless networks safely, visit www.staysmartonline.gov.au/secure-smartphone.

For more information about online safety and security for children, parents and teachers, visit www.cybersmart.gov.au.
Being digitally connected around the clock brings huge benefits for many of us, but for an increasing number of children this new connectedness also brings with it the frightening world of 24/7 bullying.

Cyberbullying is the official title given to the bullying that occurs via electronic technology: on the internet via online tools such as email, MySpace, Bebo or Facebook, or with the help of mobile technology, such as the mobile phone. The old-fashioned practice of picking on someone who can’t fight back has turned into SMS harassment or ‘flaming’, social network shaming, cyber stalking and chatgroup exclusion. The most comprehensive research to date, the *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study* (ACBPS), released in May, suggests 10 per cent of students in years four to nine have been victims of cyberbullying. That number is increasing, reports the study, and the older students are, the more likely they were to have had some connection to the ‘behind the screens’ bullying.

But research by the Australian Catholic University suggests the number of young people being bullied may be much higher, given that many children won’t report it for fear of losing access to the technology.

**Loneliness, isolation and anger**

For the victims cyberbullying means loneliness, isolation and anger. Even those responsible for the cyberbullying say they feel ‘really bad’, ‘embarrassed’ and ‘sad’.

More worryingly, a recent online survey by Kids Helpline involving 600 respondents found that cyberbullying is more associated with thoughts of suicide than any other type of bullying.

**Beating the virtual thugs**

But there are some solutions for those caught in a digital web of intimidation and harassment, even though anti-cyberbullying strategies are just getting underway and research remains limited. In July, the Australian
Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) launched the Cybersmart website, which is a resource for parents and children about how to use the internet safely. Although it has been criticised by some for adopting a somewhat simplistic approach to the problem, AMCA cybersafety manager Sharon Trotter says the aim is to provide practical, clear steps for people to follow. “We see cyberbullying as being one of the key cybersafety issues,” says Trotter.

The Cybersmart tips for avoiding and stopping cyberbullying include:

➤ Ignore it. Don’t respond to the bully and they may go away
➤ Block it. Reject messages from unwanted numbers on the mobile phone or bar hostile people from social networking sites
➤ Tell someone. It may be hard, but discuss it with a parent, teacher or contact a helpline
➤ Keep the evidence. Save texts and emails that may be used as evidence
➤ Report it. Tell the school, the internet or phone provider, or the police.

Parents or schools taking phones and internet access away from children who have been cyberbullied can risk further isolating victims from their support networks.

How to treat the technology

But Trotter says they don’t want people to fear technology. Parents or schools taking phones and internet access away from children who have been cyberbullied can risk further isolating victims from their support networks.

“We really want to encourage parents not to react by taking away the technology because the technology is very important for young people. It’s really a matter of encouraging dialogue and not to just shut it down or take it away,” says Trotter.

ACMA will soon launch a campaign to stop cyberbullying. Called ‘Let’s Fight it Together’, it encourages community-wide involvement with the help of the real-life story of a boy who was cyberbullied, and how he drew on the support of family and friends to end the ordeal.

Importance of bystanders

The need to encourage the bystanders – that’s more than 80 per cent of us – to speak up and defend those being victimised is also essential. Flinders University researcher Alison Wotherspoon and colleague Phillip Slee, a professor in Human development, have been working with certain schools in Adelaide to encourage children not to be bystanders.

“The vast majority of kids are bystanders. The big thing is turn the bystanders into defenders,” says Wotherspoon.

The researchers are using young people’s own stories and ideas to create films to help stop the abuse of the technology. These projects are running alongside a federal government-supported pilot project by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation to encourage the positive use of information technology in 150 schools across the country.

At home

But while schools and government departments can provide important guidance, ultimately the experts say that an ongoing easy and trusting relationship between parents and their children is essential in protecting children from cyberbullying. This relationship needs to include an awareness of the importance of the expanding array of communications technology. This means parents should familiarise themselves with the gadgets and programs their children are using, and where necessary establish agreements about when and how that technology is to be used. But just as importantly, it also means that beyond the emailing, texting and social networking, straightforward conversation still has a big role to play.

And in the end, it’s not so different to traditional bullying as it seems.
Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others.

It differs from traditional schoolyard bullying because it often continues outside of school and school hours. It can be 24/7 and sometimes the bully is anonymous.

WHAT DOES CYBERBULLYING LOOK LIKE?

Cyberbullying might occur over the internet, in instant messaging (IM), chat rooms, social networking sites, blogs or gaming sites. It can also occur over the phone, by SMS or MMS, or other technologies.

Most cyberbullying can be organised into seven different categories:

1. **Flaming** – what might start off as a fight between two people then spreads, like flames, to include a number of other people
2. **Harassment** – tormenting someone with hateful and hurtful text messages, emails, posts and IMs that offend, humiliate or intimidate them
3. **Denigration** – putting someone down or ruining their reputation; making others think less of them
4. **Impersonation** – by you pretending to be another person online you could make someone tell you things they wouldn’t normally talk to you about. Lying hurts
5. **Outing and trickery** – tricking others into believing that you are someone else, and then revealing that someone else is a homosexual is cyberbullying. This might be done through a fake website, profile, or by editing someone’s profile
6. **Exclusion** – not letting someone participate in an online group, or excluding them from other activities because they haven’t been online
7. **Cyberstalking** – following someone through cyberspace. Moving with them to different sites and applications; posting where they post.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CYBERBULLYING?

Things that happen on the internet or on your mobile phone have real-world consequences. Some of the effects of cyberbullying are:

- Anger
- Embarrassment
- Fear
- Poor performance at school
- Loss of confidence and self-esteem
- Revenge cyberbullying
- Self-harm, even suicide.

Cyberbullying hurts people. It can ruin lives.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT CYBERBULLYING?

Don’t start it! Cyberbullying is never acceptable. Think before you post something mean, or send someone a hurtful message.

Don’t be a part of it! As a bystander, you are part of the problem. If someone tries to involve you in cyberbullying say NO.

Don’t let it get out of control! You need to tell someone if you are being cyberbullied so they can help you to make it stop.

You can stay in control by:

- Learning how to block communications from cyberbullies
- Finding out your school’s policy in relation to cyberbullying
- Researching what policies your Internet Service Provider (ISP) and any online applications you are using have on cyberbullying
- Telling someone – you should talk to a parent, teacher, or trusted friend.

Staying in control – if you’re not comfortable telling someone about cyberbullying face-to-face you can contact:

Reach Out: www.reachout.com.au
Bullying No Way! www.bullyingnoway.com.au
Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800
 Lifeline: 131 114
Youth Beyond Blue: www.youthbeyondblue.com
ThinkUKnow: www.thinkuknow.org.au (information for you and your parents)
EXPLORING ISSUES

ABOUT THIS SECTION

‘Exploring issues’ features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book.

The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

As the information in this book is gathered from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Does the source have a particular bias or agenda? Are you being presented with facts or opinions? Do you agree with the writer?

The types of ‘Exploring issues’ questions posed in each Issues in Society title differ according to their relevance to the topic at hand.

‘Exploring issues’ sections in each Issues in Society title may include any combination of the following worksheets: Brainstorm, Research activities, Written activities, Discussion activities, Quotes of note, Ethical dilemmas, Cartoon comments, Pros and cons, Case studies, Design activities, Statistics and spin, and Multiple choice.

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WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES

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Social Impacts of Digital Media 47
Brainstorm, individually or as a group, to find out what you know about social impacts of digital media.

1. Define the following terms and consider how their meanings differ from one another.

   - **Digital literacy:**

   - **Digital divide:**

   - **Social networking:**

   - **Social media:**

   - **Blogging:**

   - **Instant messaging:**

   - **Chat:**
Complete the following research activities on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

1. The Digital Revolution is the change from analog mechanical and electronic technology to digital technology that has taken place since about 1980 and which continues to the present day. It encompasses the sweeping changes brought about by digital computing and communication technology during the latter half of the 20th century. What are these changes?

2. The Digital Revolution marked the beginning of the Information Age, the current age in which we live, which is characterised by the growing ability of individuals to transfer information freely, and to have instant access to knowledge that would have been difficult or impossible to find previously. Research the Information Age, and explain its practical and social impacts.
Complete the following activities on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

1. Making effective use of the internet to research a subject requires a degree of digital media literacy that enables the user to correctly interpret the range and quality of information available online. Sources might include blogs, Facebook comments, online newspapers, refereed academic papers, Wikipedia, or elsewhere online. How do people select the most appropriate sources?

2. There is a range of behaviours that can be referred to as internet addiction. What are they?
DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

1. The internet is an increasingly important source of entertainment, and is now challenging television as Australians’ preferred medium. Discuss the various forms of entertainment available online. In what ways do you personally use the internet for recreation?

2. Discuss the ways in which digital media can be used in a commercial context by businesses.
INTERNET CENSORSHIP: Should the government introduce an internet filtering scheme to protect children from online pornography and violence?

The internet is the largest tool for mass communication and information distribution on the planet, capable of distributing large amounts of information anywhere in the world at minimal cost and with maximum speed and exposure. In recent years there has been increasing concern about the availability of and access to, inappropriate and illegal internet content, including violence, terrorist activity and child pornography.

To date, the Australian government has strived amid controversy and debate to introduce its cyber safety plan – a set of measures to combat online threats and help parents and educators protect children from inappropriate material. Does the government risk becoming caught in an unviable Web of its own making, or will acting on the best of intentions result in effective filtering and greater online safety for Australian families?

Arguments in favour of internet censorship
Some key arguments in favour of internet filtering include: the government already has a responsibility to protect its citizens from indecent material with other forms of media via the National Classification Scheme for publications, films and video games; the blocking of illegal material is not censorship, nor can the viewing of child pornography be considered freedom of speech; blocking offensive material such as images of child sexual abuse can be managed effectively and efficiently – claims that it is technically difficult should not preclude the community need for such filtering.
Arguments against internet censorship

Key arguments opposing internet filtering include beliefs that: freedom of speech is compromised by giving government too much power to interfere in the lives of its citizens; government-regulated ISP filtering will be too ineffective, too expensive, slow down the internet and result in the over-blocking of content; such censorship would be not be possible as governments cannot regulate material from abroad; it is already possible for parents to use “net nanny” browsers that will edit out offensive and inappropriate material for younger users.
Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of the next page.

1. According to the CCI Digital Futures report (2010), the following number of Australians had used the internet in the past three months (circle one answer only):
   a. One in five
   b. Two in five
   c. Three in five
   d. Four in five

2. There are currently how many Facebook users worldwide (circle one answer only):
   a. 200 million
   b. 350 million
   c. 500 million
   d. 600 million

3. Which two of these websites are not social networking services:
   a. Facebook
   b. MySpace
   c. Google
   d. Twitter
   e. Skype
   f. iTunes
   g. LinkedIn
   h. Flickr
   i. YouTube

4. Circle your responses regarding the following internet impacts according to whether or not they are benefits or potential ‘dangers’ (note: dangers apply to children, in particular):
   1. Educational games and programs benefit / danger
   2. Access inappropriate information benefit / danger
   3. Research information for school projects and business benefit / danger
   4. Inadvertently form ‘friendships’ with strangers benefit / danger
   5. Communicate with people from all around the world benefit / danger
   6. Risk personal health through excessive use benefit / danger
   7. Share resources and ideas with people that have the same interests benefit / danger
   8. Endanger privacy by revealing person details, e.g. name and address benefit / danger
   9. Become victims of cyberbullying benefit / danger
   10. Be subjected to advertising pressures benefit / danger
   11. Shop around the world without leaving your computer benefit / danger

5. Mobile phones can be used for many things. Circle any of the following if they are a mobile phone function:
   a. Make calls
   b. Send messages and emails
   c. Listen to music
   d. Store calendar appointments
   e. Take photos
   f. Pay for things
   g. Get directions
   h. Access the Web
Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of this page.

6. Match the following cyberbullying categories to their correct definitions:

1. Cyberstalking
   a. Tormenting someone with hateful and hurtful text messages, emails, posts and IMs that offend, humiliate or intimidate them.

2. Exclusion
   b. What might start off as a fight between two people then spreads, to include a number of other people.

3. Outing and trickery
   c. Pretending to be another person online to make someone tell you things they wouldn’t normally talk to you about.

4. Impersonation
   d. Putting someone down or ruining their reputation; making others think less of them.

5. Denigration
   e. Tricking others into believing that you are someone else, and then revealing that someone else is a homosexual.

6. Harassment
   f. Following someone through cyberspace. Moving with them to different sites and applications; posting where they post.

7. Flaming
   g. Not letting someone participate in an online group, or excluding them from other activities because they haven’t been online.

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\text{d} & \text{d} & \text{c, f} & \text{B (benefit)} & \text{D (danger)} & \text{B} & \text{B} & \text{D} \\
& & & & & & & \\
9 & 10 & 11 & 12 & 13 & 14 & 15 & 16 \\
\text{D} & \text{D} & \text{B} & \text{D} & \text{D} & \text{D} & \text{D} & \text{D} \\
\end{array}
\]
Read the Australian Bureau of Statistics media release below relating to the *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia 2008-09* and answer the related questions. Complete your responses on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

**Nearly two-thirds of Australian households now have broadband: ABS**

As of June 2009, just over five million households had broadband, according to figures released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This is an increase of 700,000 households or 16% on the previous year – nearly two-thirds (62%) of all households now have broadband.

The Australian Capital Territory continues to have the highest proportion of broadband connections, with nearly three-quarters (74%) of ACT households now connected. Lowest is Tasmania, at just under half (49%).

There are 6.4 million households with a computer; 5.9 million of these have internet access. This is an increase of 4.8 million connected households since 1998.

The ABS also found that households with children under 15 were more likely to have broadband access (77%) compared to households without (56%).

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of children accessed the internet from home, and almost one-third (31%) had their own mobile phones.

Children used the internet for educational activities (85%) and playing online games (69%). About half of older children (48%) used the internet to visit social networking sites and a further quarter (24%) created their own online content such as blogs or websites.

An estimated 72,000 children experienced personal safety or security problems on the internet, while 28,000 children had similar problems while using mobiles.

*Media release, 16 December 2009. © Australian Bureau of Statistics*

Further details are available in *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia 2008-09* (cat. no. 8146.0).

1. How many computers are in your home; what are they used for?

2. Survey all of the students in your class over the amount of time spent each week on the online activities below. Tally and average the results and discuss the overall digital literacy of the class.

- **Education (homework, research etc):**
- **Computer games:**
- **Social networking (including chat):**
- **Downloading/listening to music:**
- **Downloading/watching movies, shows:**
- **Shopping:**
- **Maintaining a blog/website:**

3. Have you ever experienced personal safety or security problems in relation to your computer or mobile phone use? If so, explain what they were and what strategies you used in response.
A fifth of Australians have never used the internet and in Britain, the non-users are almost a third of the adult population. (p.1)

If you're male, employed or studying, if you have a university degree and a higher than average income, you are more likely to be online. (p.1)

6 out of 10 internet users under the age of 30 say they watch less TV. (p.1)

By international standards Australia’s level of internet use is very high. In terms of home access, the vast majority of connections are now broadband (94.2%). (p.2)

In 2007, just under 4 in 5 households with internet access had a broadband connection, by 2005 this had increased to just under 95%. (p.2)

More than 8 in 10 Australians check their email at least once a day. (p.2)

Instant messaging is a popular and growing communications tool with more than a quarter of the population messaging daily. (p.2)

An estimated 841,000 children (31%) aged 5 to 14 years had access to their own mobile phones in 2009. (p.3)

Overall income that resulted from orders received via the internet for goods or services increased significantly from $56.7 billion to $81.0 billion over the period between 2005-06 and 2007-08. (p.3)

6 in 10 young Australians download or watch video content online at least weekly compared to only 1% of those aged 65 or more. (p.3)

In the last decade the concept of media literacy has broadened from its traditional focus on print and audiovisual media to encompass the internet and other convergent media. (p.5)

96% of online children in Australia find their information for school projects on the internet. (p.6)

Almost 50% of Australians don’t know where to find information about protecting personal information when using social media. (p.6)

Five attitudinal segments in relation to digital media have been identified: ‘Resistors’, ‘Defensive’, ‘Thirsty’, ‘Potential Transitioners’ and ‘Economisers’. (p.8)

There is a range of behaviours that can be referred to as internet addiction. Other terms include internet addiction disorder (IAD) and net addiction. (p.15)

Internet addiction is an umbrella term that refers to the compulsive need to spend a great deal of time on the internet, to the point where relationships, work and health are allowed to suffer. (p.16)

Most young people are using online technologies as a way to connect with their real world friends, with a small proportion – 17% of 12 to 17 year olds – using online social networking to build networks of new friends. (p.17)

Children aged 8 to 9 years use the internet for an average of 1 hour, 6 mins every 2 days. Young people aged 16 to 17 years average 3 hours, 30 mins on the internet every day. (p.17)

Young people, aged 12 to 17, have a very high level of use of social networking services. Approximately 97% of 16 to 17 year olds surveyed reported using at least one of these services, compared to 51% of children aged 8 to 11 years. (p.18)

Cyberbullying is experienced by just 1% of 8 to 9 year olds, but 19% of 16 to 17 year olds. (p.18)

Facebook claims to have more than 400 million users worldwide. If it was a country, only China and India would be bigger. (p.19)

Cyberbullying is any bullying that is carried out through technology such as the internet or mobile phones. (p.22)

A lack of accessibility features on social media is inadvertently imposing a ‘technological lock-out’ on people with disabilities. (p.24)

On average, the size of people’s discussion networks is 12% larger among mobile phone users, 9% larger for those who share photos online, and 9% bigger forthose who use instant messaging. (p.27)

The diversity of people’s core networks tends to be 25% larger for mobile phone users, 15% larger for basic internet users, and even larger for frequent internet users, those who use instant messaging, and those who share digital photos online. (p.27)

On average in a typical year, people have in-person contact with their core network ties on about 210 days. (p.27)

ISP-level content filtering is occurring in other countries, including Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. (p.34)

Content defined under the National Classification Scheme as Refused Classification includes child sexual abuse imagery, bestiality, sexual violence, detailed instruction in crime, violence or drug use and/or material that advocates the doing of a terrorist act. (p.34)

ISP-level filters can enable parents to choose from a broad range of categories of content they wish to filter without having to download or configure software on their personal computers. (p.35)

Legitimate social networking sites have privacy statements that tell you how they collect and use your information and when and how they might disclose this information either through the website or to third parties. (p.38)

Once information is online, it is not easy to remove it completely. Even if you remove information from your profile, saved or cached versions may still exist on other computers. (p.39)

To fully remove data from your phone, you need to follow the manufacturer’s instructions and remove your SIM card as well as any inserted memory card from your phone. (p.43)

16% of students in years 4 to 9 have been victims of cyber-bullying. (p.44)

Cyberbullying might occur over the internet, in instant messaging (IM), chat rooms, social networking sites, blogs or gaming sites. It can also occur over the phone, by SMS or MMS, or other technologies. (p.46)
Glossary

Accessibility
Making web pages easier to navigate and read. While this is primarily intended to assist those with disabilities, it can be helpful to all readers.

Access
The ability to see what you are trying to view e.g. you can access a friend's photo but not their profile.

Avatar
A graphical image or likeness that replaces a photo of the author of the content.

Blog
An abbreviation of the term ‘web log’. A type of website or part of a website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video.

Chat
Interaction on a website, with a number of people adding text items one after the other into the same space at (almost) the same time.

Cyberspace
Widely used as a term for the internet or World Wide Web.

Cyberbullying
The term given to bullying that occurs via electronic technology.

Digital literacy
The skills, knowledge and understanding required to use new technology and media to create and share meaning.

Embedding
The act of adding code to a website so that a video or photo can be displayed while being hosted at another site. Many users now watch embedded YouTube videos or see Flickr photos on blogs rather than on the original site.

Face-to-face
Describes people meeting offline.

Friend
1. (noun) A person with whom you have a mutually agreed connection. 2. (verb) The act of adding a person to your social graph on a particular social network. e.g. ‘friend me on Facebook’.

Groups
Collections of individuals with some sense of unity through their activities, interests or values.

Hyperlink
A navigational reference to another document or page on the World Wide Web.

Identity
The general term for ensuring the correct representation of a particular individual on a web application.

Instant messaging
Chat with one other person using an IM tool like AOL Instant Messenger, Microsoft Live Messenger or Yahoo Messenger.

Message boards
An online discussion site; people looking to discuss particular issues or needing support post threads (a message) on the forum or message board hoping to gain more information or start a conversation.

Metadata
Refers to information – including titles, descriptions, tags and captions – that describes a media item such as a video, photo or blog post.

Navigation
A menu of links or buttons allowing users to move from one web page to another within a site.

Online community
A group of people using social media tools and sites on the internet.

Open media
Refers to video, audio, text and other media that can be freely shared.

Permalinks
Are the permanent URLs to your individual blog posts, as well as categories and other lists of blog postings. A permalink is what another blogger will use to link to your article (or section), or how you might send a link to your story in an email message.

Platform
The ability for third parties to supply additional applications to users e.g. the Facebook platform.

Social networking
A broad class of websites and services that allow you to connect with friends, family, and colleagues online, as well as meet people with similar interests or hobbies. A typical social network such as Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace or Bebo allows you to create a profile, add friends, communicate with other members and add your own media.

Sexting
The act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones.

Tagging
The act of allocating particular keywords to content e.g. Facebook or Flickr photos.

Virtual world
An online computer-simulated space like ‘Second Life’ that mixes aspects of real life with fantasy elements.

Voice over internet protocol
VOIP enables you to use a computer or other internet device for phone calls without additional charge, including conference calls, e.g. Skype.
Websites with further information on the topic

ActNow  www.actnow.com.au
Australian Communication and Media Authority  www.acma.gov.au
Australian Council on Children and the Media  www.youngmedia.org.au
Australian Federal Police  www.afp.gov.au
Cybersmart  www.cybersmart.gov.au
Kidsafe  www.kidsafe.net.au
Internet Industry Association  www.iia.net.au
NetAlert  www.netalert.gov.au
Office of the Privacy Commissioner  www.privacy.gov.au
Stay Smart Online  www.staysmartonline.gov.au

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