The relationship between gender and Internet use in teenagers

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Abstract

Current middle and high school students spend as many as eight hours/day online. Some researchers have found that males tend to spend more time online in their free time, but others, including this research, have found that teenage girls spend as much time online as their male counterparts. This study looked at middle and high school students who attended summer technology programs, both residential and commuter. There were slightly more males (55%) than females in attendance, yet Internet use was relatively equal. The difference, as was hypothesized, was not in the amount of time spent online, but in the reasons the two groups spent their time at the keyboard or on their phones. In the summer of 2012, over 250 students were surveyed as to their choices for online participation. Statistical analyses were run on the collected data. This brief paper will describe the differences in online participation between genders for middle and high school students.

Introduction

“Simply being able to use technology is no longer enough” (for students of the 21st century), (ISTE.NETS for students, 2013). The digital age is upon us and as quoted from the national education technology standards website, our students must learn how to use the technology to live productive lives, in this rapidly changing technological society. It has been recorded that by June, 2012, there were over 2.4 billion internet users (Internet World Stats, 2012). Of this total, 22% live in the U.S.A. Schools who try to bring the Internet into the schools face challenges of trying to get all mobile and stationary devices to join the same network, trying to curb students from spending their time on social networks or interactive games, and maintaining a sense of integrity with the students, especially in relations to plagiarism, cheating, hacking and uploading viruses that shut down entire school networks. Schools must have a plan, but teachers need to know how to hold the attention of their students, attention that is divided by the enormous number of different devices brought into the school, and the focus each student maintains once online.
The purpose of this study was not to address the issues the IT people have, with networks and logistics, but to try to determine what the students will be attracted to, once online. It was hypothesized that boys would be much more likely to be familiar with online tools and digital devices, but once turned on, boys and girls would de travel to distinctly different digital directions. It was hypothesized boys and girls would not enjoy the same activities, and if this hypothesis was supported, teachers could design activities to teach all students.

Methodology

Students were brought to a local university during the school day and during summer months to take part in a technology-related outreach program. Prior use of technology was not required and the levels of abilities with digital devices were widespread between all participants. Each student used a personal computer while at the campus along with hand-held GPS and digital cameras. All cell phones were encouraged to be turned off during the day-long activities. Students were taught how to create PowerPoint presentation, displays of digital pictures in portfolios using Comic Life, and electronic books using Microsoft Publisher, using the Catalog template. Students took pre- and post-surveys and wrote in Blackboard journals at the end of the day. The goals of the 1-day event were to: 1) allow public school students on a college campus; 2) teach students how to use presentation tools which could be used in their classrooms; and 3) to identify certain technology characteristics of the students through self-reported surveys. The surveys were short and to the point, time was given for reflection in journals, and students went back to their school from a day-long field trip.

Results

A complete statistical analysis is not available for this section of this brief. Data is still being analyzed and will be ready to disseminate at the conference. Some descriptive statistics and qualitative material is, however, ready.

Gender - There were 55% male students present at the 1-day camps. It was expected that this number would be more skewed due to the title of “Technology Field Trip” associated with the activities for the day. Others have found boys to be much more comfortable, experienced and willing to use technology.

Types of technology – Boys reported spending more time than girls playing role-playing games, simulation games and adventure and action games. Girls spent more time playing individual
games than boys, such as solitaire and word games. Girls spent more time than boys on the internet in shopping sites, social media sites and reading. Boys spend more time online than girls watching movies and doing homework.

Reflections

Girls made comments like, “I am on the Internet every day. I can navigate to where I want to go as well as any boy, but they just like to play games while I can do anything”. And, “Facebook is my reality away from reality”.

Boys gave comments like, “I like Starcraft and WOW. I play them both daily. I am a level 23 mage.” And, I watch movies on my iPad every day and now on my phone. I am pretty good with technology.”

Summary,

For the session, a detailed statistical analysis will be presented for each survey question. Additional comments and an analysis of these will be presented.

References


http://www.usdoj.gov/03press/03_1_1.html