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New research reveals the online lives of New Zealand kids

Netsafe's latest research uncovers important insights about New Zealand children's experiences online and their skills in navigating these online experiences.

The report, the first to study online experiences of nine to 17 year old New Zealand children, found Kiwi kids are making the most of online opportunities for entertainment, learning and socialising but are less engaged in community, civic or creative activities online.

These community, civic and creative activities included discussing social problems online, writing a blog or connecting with people from a different background.

Martin Cocker, Netsafe CEO, says the research raises questions about what kinds of activities we expect children to engage in online. "New Zealand kids are largely following the same trends we see overseas in terms of preferred activities online, but it raises questions about whether our kids could be getting more out of their online experiences" says Cocker.

The report found that whilst most New Zealand kids are confident in their digital skills, younger children aged nine to eleven are not as digitally confident as most adults might think. "This challenges the idea that children growing up now are instinctively 'digital natives' and suggests younger children may need more active help to protect their safety online" says Cocker.

There is also a big jump in the use of the internet to connect with others over social media between the ages of 12-14 which Cocker says comes with a new set of opportunities and challenges.

"The pre-teen age bracket is an important intervention period to help children develop online safety skills given their internet use is likely to change in early teenage-hood" says Cocker.

Netsafe's research also brings to light differences in children's internet access and online safety skills between ethnic groups.

Asian children were more likely to report frequent access to the internet compared to Pākehā and Māori children with Pacific children reporting the lowest rates of internet access. Pacific children were less confident in their skills to protect their privacy online and, along with Māori children, were less confident in their ability to determine whether what they find on the internet is true or not.

"Inequalities in access could mean that some children are missing out on online opportunities to learn, create and engage" says Cocker.

There are also gender differences in how kids engage online. The research found girls were more likely to use instant messaging and photo-sharing apps while boys were more likely to be

using the internet for online gaming. The finding suggests boys and girls will face different kinds of online challenges.

“Helping kids access online opportunities safely is important and it can be challenging for parents to strike this balance”, says Cocker. “Having ongoing conversations with your children about how they’re using devices, what platforms they’re on and who they’re connecting to goes a long way.”

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About the Ngā taiohi matihiko o Aotearoa – New Zealand Kids Online study

In September 2018, Netsafe, with the support of UNICEF NZ, joined Global Kids Online, an international network of academics, social researchers, and experts dedicated to the study of children’s rights, risks and opportunities in the digital age.

Global Kids Online’s purpose is to generate rigorous cross-national research-based evidence regarding the way children access and use the internet and to understand the risks and opportunities of their interaction with digital tools.

In the coming months, Netsafe will publish more findings from Ngā taiohi matihiko o Aotearoa - New Zealand Kids Online addressing topics such as children’s experiences of online risk and parents’ efforts to support their child to navigate the online environment.

About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation with an unrelenting focus on online safety. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice and education. Visit netsafe.org.nz for useful resources or call 0508 638 723 seven days a week for help with an online incident.

Netsafe created the Online Safety Parent Toolkit to make it easier for parents and whānau to teach their kids to have a safer online experience. Check out our tips, advice and tools at netsafe.org.nz/parenttoolkit

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