

# Adolescent IT and Social Media Use: Parental Awareness, Concern and Monitoring

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored parental awareness of Southland school students' online activity, with a focus on parental concern and monitoring of children's use of social media platforms. Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered via an online questionnaire and provided findings that state 77% of parents are concerned about their child's online activity, 81% parents are using one or more types of monitoring, and 28% of children are on Facebook under the minimum age limit. The results highlight the need for usage regulation and guidance for parents in order to help them direct their children toward safe use of social media.

**Keywords:** Facebook, online activity, parental awareness, parental concern, parental monitoring, quantitative and qualitative data, social media

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to a survey carried out by Symantec, (Norton 2014) New Zealand parents are both largely unaware of their children's online activities and are avoiding vital conversations about their children's online privacy and security. The survey revealed that 48 percent of parents had never checked their children's online activities and one in five parents admitted that their child had joined a social networking platform while under the age of the sites' minimum age limit. In a 2014 Trend Micro revealed that of 605 parents surveyed, 59 percent of children aged 8 – 11 and 74 percent of children aged 12 – 15 either have their own mobile device or have access to their parent's mobile device. Trend Micro also concluded that the number one parental concern with their children's use of mobile devices was access to inappropriate content. The present study aimed to examine parent awareness, concerns and use of monitoring in relation to their child's IT and social media use. The population surveyed were parents of year 7 to 13 students living in Southland. One of the main outcomes of this research is to design educational workshops for parents, firstly in Southland and then further afield.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered using a questionnaire, which comprised of 13 questions. A large higher decile rated school was approached as a pilot for this study. It was asked that parents of the students from years 7 - 13, be sent (via email) an invitation to participate in a short online survey. The questionnaire items were designed to explore parental awareness of their children's online activity, and their concern regarding this. Items were also designed to investigate how parents monitor their children's online activity. Information pertaining to the nature of the study and how the data would be stored, analysed and disseminated was included in the initial email. Parents were also advised that their participation was both voluntary, and anonymous.

## 3. RESULTS

A total of 322 valid responses were received relating to 158 male children and 164 female children.

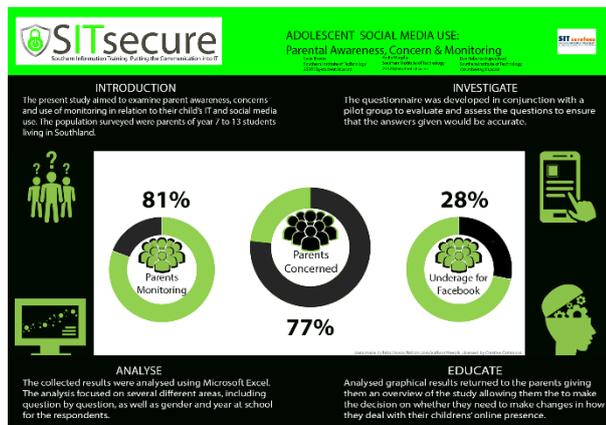
### 3.1 Device type and access

All participants were parents/caregivers of students who use devices of varying kinds, very often more than two or three different types. Almost all of the male and female students had access to a shared family device (83%). Over 50 percent of students of both genders reportedly had their own smartphone. Notable gender differences were recorded with respect to tablets with 41 percent of males compared to 50 percent of female students having access to this form of device. Whereas, more males (38%) had their own gaming device compared to females (13%).

### 3.2 Parental concern

Parents were asked to rate their level of concern regarding their children's online activity. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = "not concerned" to 5 = "very concerned". As shown in the table below (Table 1), seventy-five (23%) of parents rated feeling "not concerned" about their child's online activity. The majority of parents provided ratings of 2, 3 or 4 (70%), indicating that most parents had some level of concern. Parents who identified feeling "very concerned" numbered 23 in total (7%).

When the data was analyzed with respect to gender of the student, the findings demonstrated that a smaller percentage of parents of male students (20%) rated "not concerned" when



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compared to parent ratings of female students (27%). Conversely, a greater number of parents of male students provided a rating of 2 (37%) when compared to parents of female students who also provided a rating of 2 (25%). Otherwise, the number of parents rating either a 3, 4 or 5 was comparative across gender groups.

**Table 1 Concern Levels of Parents Based on Gender**

Gender	Parental concern rating (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Male	20%	37%	23%	13%	7%
Female	27%	25%	27%	14%	7%

### 3.3 Parental awareness of child's social media use (Facebook)

Parents were asked to identify from a list of social media applications which ones they knew their child had accounts with. Table 2 summarizes the findings in relation to Facebook. (Other applications were covered in the study but in the interest of space have not been reported in this paper).

While the margin of error and potentially low number of responses to some of the categories (boys in year 7 as an example) can affect the percentages, it is still reasonably clear that the trend is for more mature students to use Facebook, especially females.

Of interest to this research are the number of students in years 7 and 8 whose parents know that those students have Facebook accounts. As per Facebook's terms of service, the minimum age is 13, which would typically be year 9 or higher. This is a concern because it is parents encouraging irresponsible behaviour.

**Table 2 Parental Awareness of Facebook Use**

Year (7-13)	Total number of males that use Facebook	Total number of females that use Facebook
	(%)	(%)
Year 7	42%	11%
Year 8	17%	18%
Year 9	40%	60%
Year 10	61%	83%
Year 11	90%	79%
Year 12	78%	100%
Year 13	89%	79%

### 3.4 Parental monitoring

Parents were invited to report on the various forms of online activity monitoring they implemented in their homes. A list of options was provided and parents were asked to endorse all that applied to them. As shown in the table below (Table 3) the following results were obtained:

Around half of all parents (irrespective of student gender) implemented time restriction. Almost 50 percent of parents of female students engaged in history and content checking, compared to 39 percent of parents of male students. Around a third of parents of both males and females implemented device use under supervision, parent as a friend, and collecting devices

at certain times of the day. A smaller percentage of parents (20%), reported no monitoring strategies.

**Table 3 Parental Monitoring Styles**

Monitoring Styles	Total number of male students (%)	Total number of female students (%)
Under supervision	40%	36%
Time restrictions	54%	52%
Checking history and content	39%	49%
Parent as a friend	30%	40%
Monitoring software	23%	26%
Collect devices	30%	31%
Do not monitor	19%	20%

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study found that like New Zealand youth in general, Southland youth (school years 7 – 13) have access to at least one form of device, with many using several different types. As such they have access to a range of online material (sometimes before the required age requirements), which can bring with it, numerous concerns for parents. Indeed this study found that most of the parents surveyed indicated some level of concern about their children's online activity. In order to manage the perceived risks, parents most commonly implement time restrictions and check their children's online history and content. Interestingly, parents of female students, when compared to male students, are more inclined to do so, which may reflect a greater level of protectiveness over female children or alternatively, higher levels of worry and mistrust. A concerning finding, is that almost one fifth of parents reported no method of parent monitoring or checking. This study was intended to expand the researchers' knowledge of parent behaviour and attitudes in relation to their child's online activity. As a result of the study the researchers conclude that Southland parents would benefit from having access to educational workshops to help open the dialogue between themselves and their child around awareness and safe use of IT and social media.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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