AUSSIE KIDS ‘EARLIEST INTERNET USERS’

Australian children are among the youngest and prolific users of the internet in the world, according to a new study that compared the experience of Australian children aged 9-16 to those of their European counterparts.

The study, AU Kids Online, was authored by Professor Lelia Green, Professor John Hartley and Professor Catharine Lumby from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI). It was carried out in parallel with a 25 nation survey in the Europe.

Four hundred 9-16 year olds and their parents or carers were interviewed face to face for the study. “This is the first Australian study of its kind where children were directly interviewed on a large scale about their online experience,” says Prof. Green. “It gives us significant empirically sound information about the opportunities and the risks for Australian children in the online and mobile media era.”

A key finding of the study is that Australian children were on average a little under 8 years old when they began using the internet. – making them among the youngest users in the 26 nation study.

The study reports that seventy six per cent of Australian children and young teenagers go online daily, with the average time spent online bordering over one and half hour per day.

“One of the pleasing findings was that parental mediation of online use and safety was high in Australia and that teachers were also very active in guiding children on internet use,” said Prof. Green.

“However, 30 per cent of Australian children reported encountering something online that upset or bothered them – two and a half times the European average. The content predominantly related to online bullying and sexual images, which were more likely to bother younger users.”

Professor Green said this finding pointed to the need for further focus on supporting parents, teachers and carers to give children and teenagers tools to manage their online experience.
“The study reveals that while a minority of children are upset by online risks, many benefit from the advice and tools available to them. The risks and opportunities of the online world go hand in hand for children and it is important to avoid being overly restrictive.”

Professor Lumby noted that the study showed that Australian children and teenagers were not only using the internet to passively consume material – they were actively creating and sharing content, with almost half photos, videos or music.

She added: “This study shows that now is the time for Australia to invest in supporting educational initiatives to keep our children safe online and able to explore the significant benefits of online learning and social networking.”


It draws on the work of the ‘EU Kids Online’ network funded by the EC (DG Information Society) Safer Internet plus Programme (project code SIP-KEP-321803); see www.eukidsonline.net.

The ARC Centre for Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI) is helping to build a creative Australia through cutting edge research spanning the creative industries, media and communications, arts, cultural studies, law, information technology, education and business. It is funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC).

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