



Press Conference on Survey Report of Internet Use in Hong Kong:
Is Internet an obstacle or a bridge between Parents and their Children?

Internet Professional Association (iProA), in cooperation with a group of BA (Hons) in English for Professional Communication final year students of City University of Hong Kong (CityU), has conducted a survey in February 2010 with 410 respondents aged 14-70 about their views on and habit of using Internet in Hong Kong. Mr. Gary Chao, Chief Executive of iProA, announced the survey result at the press conference held at CityU on March 10, 2010.

The widespread use of Internet and the proposed subsidy for Internet access charges in the 2010-2011 Budget, show that Internet is important to our lives. People nowadays are living in a digital world. Internet is generally believed to be facilitating communication and the transference of information, bringing convenience to our lives. However, the fast-changing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) widens the digital divide between Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives*. The research shows that there is a discrepancy of ICT application between the post-60s/70s and post-80s, especially their views on social networking sites. The difference in communication style and views of the Internet might have caused conflicts between these two generations. In order to diminish the conflicts between post-80s Digital Natives and their Digital Immigrant parents, there is a need to learn about the misunderstandings and bridge this divide.

With the development of ICT and the promotion of e-education, Internet is playing an important role in learning. Research shows that more than 90 percent of parents and nearly 70 percent of students agree that Internet can facilitate learning and 64 percent of students believe that they perform better while connected to the Internet.

Nevertheless, the extensive use of Internet make parents worry about their children's online activities and the information they received from the Internet. Result shows that one out of four parents will peek at the websites their children are browsing, or even secretly check the browsing history of their children, to figure out what they are doing. Research also reveals that whilst most parents agree that Internet helps students in learning, almost 60 percent of parents still think that surfing the Internet while doing homework is a sign of distraction. This indicates that parents may not have adequate knowledge about the proper application of ICT.

Age is another factor that affects parents' attitudes towards their children's use of Internet. Parents aged 31-40, compared with those aged above 40, are more worried about their children's activities on the Internet. More than 80 percent of them think that children are not concentrating if they stay online while doing homework. Younger parents tend to be more avid Internet users compared to elder parents and thus be more aware of the influence of Internet which caused their worries. Older



parents do not engage in many online activities compared to younger parents and therefore they may have less knowledge about online activities and its meaning to the post-80s Digital Natives.

Concerning about the views on social networking sites between post-80s and their parents, 72 percent of students visit social networking sites which is their main online activity and 62 percent think social networking sites are important to them for communicating with friends and maintaining relationships. Conversely, only 24 percent of parents visit social networking sites. Fifty-three percent of parents think using Facebook or MSN messenger frequently is a kind of addiction and a waste of time whereas approximately 50 percent of students think their parents do not understand the pleasure and benefits brought by the Internet which results in conflicts.

Although parents believe that the activities students engage on the Internet is a waste of time, 51 percent are willing to learn how to use these new channels such as Facebook to communicate with their children. This suggests that there is a contradiction in parents' mind between their questions about the Internet and their desire of improving their relationships with their children.

Parents who do not use the Internet have even more negative view on social networking sites. Seventy-five percent think that children are wasting time on social networking sites and instant messenger and are addicted to these ICT applications. Sixty-five percent are reluctant to learn new technologies to communicate with and understand their children.

Regarding the methods parents used to monitor their children's online activities and habits, 64 percent of the respondents said they will talk to their children directly, but only 15 percent will encourage their children to participate in workshops related to proper use of Internet and only 5 percent will install filtering software. Mr. Gary Chao believed that most parents lack adequate knowledge about the Internet. Even though parents spend time communicating with their children, the digital divide and misunderstandings are barriers which may lead to conflict. Mr. Chao suggested that if parents want to understand their children more, they should take the initiative to learn more about the Internet in order to narrow the digital divide. He also encouraged parents to participate in workshops with their children, so as to understand the pleasure and benefits brought by the Internet. Hence, Internet can bridge the post-80s and their parents.

The research finds that different people have different views towards the Internet. Generally, Internet is beneficial to human lives. However, it may have different definitions under different circumstances. In education aspect, parents believe Internet can affect children's learning outcomes. Under today social environment, younger parents classify Internet as a platform for sharing and entertainment as well as a risk of being trapped and bringing harm, whereas older parents think that Internet is just a new technology used by their children. Among parents who do not use the Internet, engaging in online activities is a waste of time. The post-80s generation considers Internet as a useful tool that helps to improve human relationship and make lives better.

* "Digital Natives" and "Digital Immigrants" are raised by Marc Prensky in 2001. The post-80s generation who lives in the world furnished and landscaped with technology, is known as the



Digital Natives. In contrast, their parents, the post-60s/70s generation, who adapted to the changing environment, is known as Digital Immigrants.



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