

Executive Summary – Key Findings

What does online life look like for the average young Canadian?

First and foremost, these are highly connected children and teens, most of who are accustomed to online access through devices that are portable and personal. This is a big shift from 2005, where the majority of students accessed the Internet through desktop computers at home. Today's youth have multiple platforms to choose from to go online.

► Online Access

- Almost every student we surveyed has access to the Internet outside of school.
 - Internet access is universal, with 99 percent of students able to access the Internet outside of school.
 - When asked to indicate how they connect to the Internet when they're not in school (from a list that included a family desktop computer, their own desktop computer, a portable computer, a computer at a library or community centre, an MP3 player, cell/smart phone, game console or "I only go on the Internet when I'm at school) half of all students report using a shared family computer to go online; but these numbers drop from 64 percent in Grade 4, to 37 percent in Grade 11.
 - Six percent of students rely on computers at local libraries and community centres to connect.
 - Boys (27%) are more likely than girls (18%) to use their own desktop computer to go online, but the largest gender difference relating to how young people access the Internet is that 60 percent of boys access the Net through a gaming console compared to 27 percent of girls.
- Portable devices are used more than desktop computers to access the Internet.
 - Even in Grade 5, more students access the Internet through a tablet or laptop than through a desktop computer (62% compared to 59%).
 - Eighty percent of French language students in Quebec use a portable device to go online, compared to 67 percent of English language students in the rest of Canada.
 - Older students are more likely than younger students to go online using their own desktop computer, ranging from a low of 17 percent in Grade 4 to 27 percent in Grade 11.
 - MP3 players are commonly used to go online – especially for students in grades 4-8 – but decline in use throughout high school.
 - Access to the Internet through laptops and cell phones rises in grades 9-11.

- Cell phones and smart phones are primary devices for students to go online.
 - Close to half (49%) of students in Grade 4 have access to their own phone or someone else's phone on a regular basis.
 - There's little difference between girls and boys when it comes to accessing or owning a cell phone.
 - One-quarter (24%) of students in Grade 4, half (52%) of students in Grade 7, and 85 percent of students in Grade 11 have their own cell phone.

► Online Activities

Students in 2013 are confident and enthusiastic users of networked technology, although they may not always be using networked devices to their fullest potential. Online life has become increasingly social, with social networking now an integral component of many online activities. Young Canadians are also turning to the Internet as an important source of information – from sports and news to more sensitive topics such as mental and physical health.

- Creative uses of digital media, such as posting homemade videos or mash-ups are still relatively uncommon.
 - Approximately one-quarter to a third of students have used networked tools to post their own stories or artwork (38%), videos or audio clips (33%) or mash-ups (22%), but only a small number do any of these on a regular basis.
- Participatory civic uses of digital media are also relatively low.
 - Less than a third of students have posted comments on news sites, 50 percent have passed on links to people on news stories or current events and just over a third have joined or supported activist groups online.
- Digital media are a source of information on a variety of issues, with 78 percent of students using the Internet to find information about news, health issues or relationships.
 - Overall, 49 percent of students use the Internet to follow news and current events: this climbs steadily from 28 percent in Grade 4 to 65 percent in Grade 11.
 - The biggest gender differences can be seen in finding information about sports (63% of boys report this compared to 31% of girls) and looking for news relating to entertainment and celebrities (53% of girls compared to 32% of boys).
 - Girls are also more likely to seek out information about mental health issues (14% compared to 9% of boys), physical health issues (20% compared to 16% of boys) and relationship problems (18% compared to 9% of boys).
 - Close to a third of students have gone online to ask an expert or other kids for advice about personal problems.
 - Compared to students in younger grades, a higher percentage of students in grades 7-11 report looking for information on more sensitive topics such as mental health issues, sexuality, physical health issues and relationship problems.

- Online media are primarily used for entertainment and communicating with friends and family.
 - The most frequent online activities reported by students are:
 - playing online games (59%)
 - downloading or streaming music, TV shows or movies (51%)
 - reading or posting on someone else’s social network site (52%)
 - posting on the student’s own social networking site (41%)
 - posting on the student’s own Twitter site (21%)
 - following friends and family on Twitter (21%)
 - following celebrities on Twitter (20%)
 - pranking or trolling someone (20%).
 - French language students in Quebec are much less likely than English language students in the rest of Canada to use Twitter.
 - Although more boys than girls play online games, especially in the earlier grades, by Grade 9, following other people on social networking sites and downloading/streaming mainstream media content online are the most frequent activities for both genders.
- Canadian youth like socializing online, even in younger grades.
 - Almost one-third of students in grades 4-6 have a Facebook account, in spite of its terms of use agreement that bars children under the age of 13 from using the site.
 - Sixteen percent of students in grades 4-6 also have Twitter accounts, which have similar age restrictions.
 - For grades 4-6, boys (36%) are slightly more likely to have Facebook accounts than girls (30%) but there is no gender difference for Twitter accounts.
 - Overall, the number of Facebook accounts rises substantially after Grade 6, from 67 percent in Grade 7 to 95 percent in Grade 11.
 - About half of students in grades 7-11 (47%) have Twitter accounts.

► Top 10 Favourite Websites

When asked to name their favourite websites, predominant themes are online videos, gaming and social networking. All students enjoy watching, and sometimes posting, videos on YouTube. Generally, younger students prefer to visit game sites, while older students prefer social media sites. In younger grades, both girls and boys list numerous gaming sites and virtual worlds amongst their favourites, with social networking an integral part of much of the online play on the sites preferred by girls.

- Overall, students in 2013 listed more than 3,000 different favourite websites.
- YouTube, at 75 percent, is the top site among all students.
- Next on the list overall is Facebook (57%) followed by Google (31%).

- There is a fair degree of consensus about the Top 10 most popular sites: YouTube, Facebook, Google and Twitter appear in the Top 10 list for both boys and girls across all grades.
- For older students, Facebook is the second most popular choice for both girls and boys.
- Seven of the Top 10 favourite sites allow users to post and share information and content (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Minecraft and Hotmail), illustrating the need to teach young people digital literacy skills so they understand privacy, digital permanence, ethical decision-making and protecting personal information.

› Opinions about Online Safety

When asked whether they agree or disagree with statements relating to online safety, students appear both aware of the potential risks of going online and confident in their ability to handle online risk. Feelings of safety grow with age, from a low of 50 percent in grades 4 and 7 to a high of 66 percent in Grade 11.

- The majority of students, especially girls, are aware of the risks of talking to strangers online. However, almost all students are confident in their ability to protect themselves online and a majority feel that the Internet is a safe place for them.
 - Girls are both more likely than boys to agree with the statement that they could be hurt by online strangers (82% compared to 63% of boys) and less likely to see the Internet as a safe place (51% compared to 61% of boys).
 - Comparing grades, feelings of safety rise from a low of 50 percent in grades 4 and 7 to a high of 66 percent in Grade 11.
 - But despite concerns about safety, high percentages of boys (90%) and girls (89%) agree with the statement that “I know how to protect myself online”.
 - Even the youngest students are confident in their ability to protect themselves online, with 77 percent of Grade 4 students indicating this.

› Parental Involvement

Many of the students participating in the 2013 survey paint a picture of parents who are actively engaged in their online lives. This ranges from setting online rules (over 84% of students indicate having at least one rule), to going online with their children, to teaching their children about online issues.

- Overall, the percentage of household rules about online activities has declined dramatically from 2005 to 2013, most notably in rules relating to meeting online acquaintances in person (30% fewer students have rules on this) and sites you are not supposed to visit (28% fewer students have rules on this).

- Girls are more likely than boys to have household rules in place regarding online activities. This suggests that girls are more regulated than boys and may carry additional burdens with respect to their own online safety and the tone of their online interactions.
- At the same time, students with household rules are less likely to engage in activities that adults consider risky, such as posting their contact information, visiting gambling sites, seeking out online pornography or talking to strangers online.
- Overall, the percentage of students who are “usually” online at home with a parent or other adult increased from 2005 to 2013, and the percentage that are “never” online at home with a parent or adult decreased from 2005 to 2013.
 - Although parental supervision is much higher for younger students than for older students, a substantial percentage of students in grades 4-6, nearly one-third, never sit with an adult or parents when online.
- The good news is that along with teachers, young people report learning about a wide range of online issues from their parents.
 - Almost half (45%) of students of all ages report that they’ve learned about online issues from their parents and 41 percent report learning this from teachers.

► Unplugging

A few questions were asked to gauge just how connected young Canadians are – and how they feel about this.

- Thirty-nine percent of students who have cell phones sleep with them in case they get calls or messages during the night.
 - This peaks at just over half of students by Grade 11, but one-fifth of Grade 4 students also report sleeping with their phones.
- Although one-third of students worry that they spend too much time online, only half say they would be upset or unhappy if they had to unplug for anything other than school work for a week.
- Ninety-four percent of students choose to go offline to do other things like spending more time with friends or family, enjoying some quiet time by themselves or going outside.