

Parenting and Social Media Survey

The Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC) recently conducted the *Parenting and Social Media Survey* to measure the actions of parents in regard to their children's usage of social media. Mobile device usage by children was also minimally covered in the study. The ITRC conducted this survey in order to better understand how parents try to keep their children safe while using social media. There were 207 responses.

"Children are spending more and more time online, and social media is becoming a larger part of their social lives. It is therefore important to understand how parents are monitoring their children's usage of social networking sites," said Nikki Junker, Social Media Coordinator for the ITRC. "The survey results will help the ITRC in developing informative materials and documents for parents and children to help them navigate their social media experiences safely."

With Facebook considering allowing children under 13 join its user population, how parents interact with their children regarding social media is going to become more important. It is the ITRC's hope that the findings of this survey will provide insight on how to improve this important communication.

Executive Summary:

The following are the results from a survey recently conducted by the Identity Theft Resource Center on the beliefs and behaviors of parents who have children using social media. The purpose of this survey was to determine the parental actions of those with children under the age of 18, in regard to social media and to a lesser extent, mobile device usage.

The ITRC study shows that the majority of parents are very concerned about their children's online activities. Generally, parents are also very involved in their children's online identity. This involvement takes the form of communicating with their children about protecting their information online and monitoring their social networking accounts, among other actions.

According to a recently released study by Comcast, 95 percent of parents think it is necessary to talk about online security risks and behaviors with their children¹. This finding mirrors the finding of the ITRC's study that parents are in fact concerned about their children and online safety. Interestingly enough, many parents have quickly developed rules and standards for their children in regard to social media. This has happened in the relatively short time that social media has become an everyday reality for their children.

The ITRC study showed that a large majority of parents not only monitored their children's social networks, but knew how to do so effectively. The majority of parents who were polled answered that their children started using social media between the ages of 13 and 15. It is encouraging to see that parents are playing an active role in their children's online activity and safety.

Overall, the ITRC study reflects similar findings to other research done on teens and social media. According to research published by Top Ten Reviews, 55percent percent of teens have given out

¹ Comcast (2011) *Internet Safety Survey*

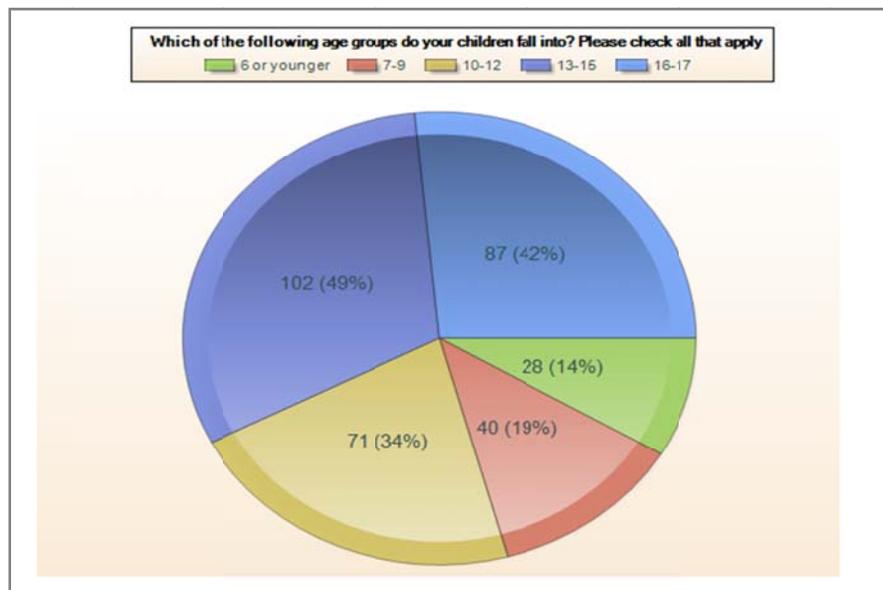
personal information on Facebook to someone they didn't know². This behavior establishes the need for parents to be concerned about their children's personal information online.

Recently, Facebook considered allowing children less than 13 years of age to join the social network³. This possibility makes clear the increasing need for parent's involvement in their children's online social lives. As more social media sites follow suit, and younger and younger children are involved online, the need for research such as this ITRC study will also become more important. It is our hope that the concerns expressed within the study encourage more parents to be aware and involved with their children's participation in the social networking sphere.

Key Findings:

Q1: Which of the following age groups do your children fall into? Please check all that apply (N=200)

Almost half of parents who completed the study had children in 13-15 year old age range. This age group is important, considering that 13 is the minimum age at which children are allowed, by site guidelines, to hold an account on most social media sites. Respondents were able to include children from multiple age groups. It is also interesting to note that children 6 or younger (14 percent), ages 7-9 (19 percent) and ages 10-12(34 percent) represented a significant group (67 percent of total respondents).



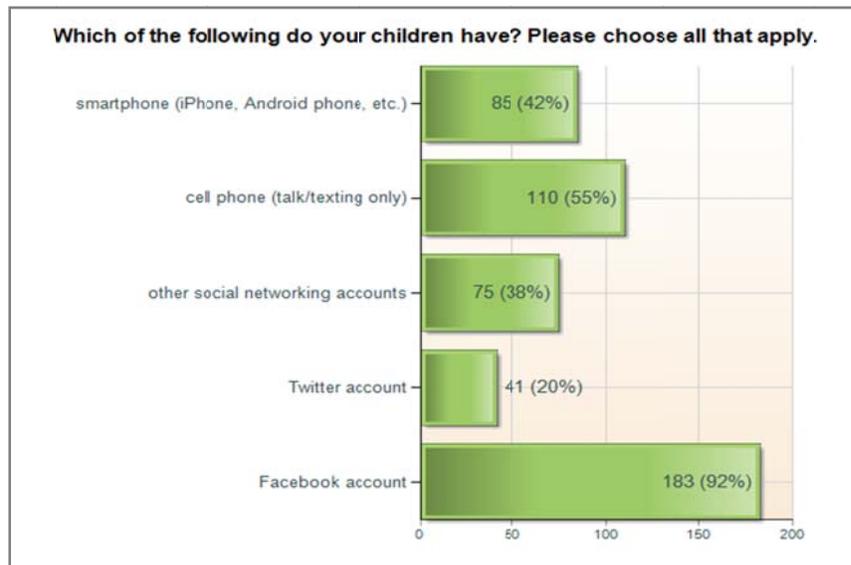
Q2: Which of the following do your children have? Please choose all that apply. (N=200)

An astonishing 91 percent of the children of those surveyed had a Facebook account, while only 20 percent had Twitter accounts. More than 40 percent of the children of those surveyed had smartphones and more than half had a cell phone for talk and text purposes only. It is apparent that young people are a completely "wired" generation. Based on the number of responses, each child represented in the study had approximately 2.5 social and/or mobile accounts each on average. The implication for safety from insecure practices extends past social media safety, to include smartphones and texting issues.

² Thomas, T. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://facebook-parental-controls-review.toptenreviews.com/30-statistics-about-teens-and-social-networking.html>

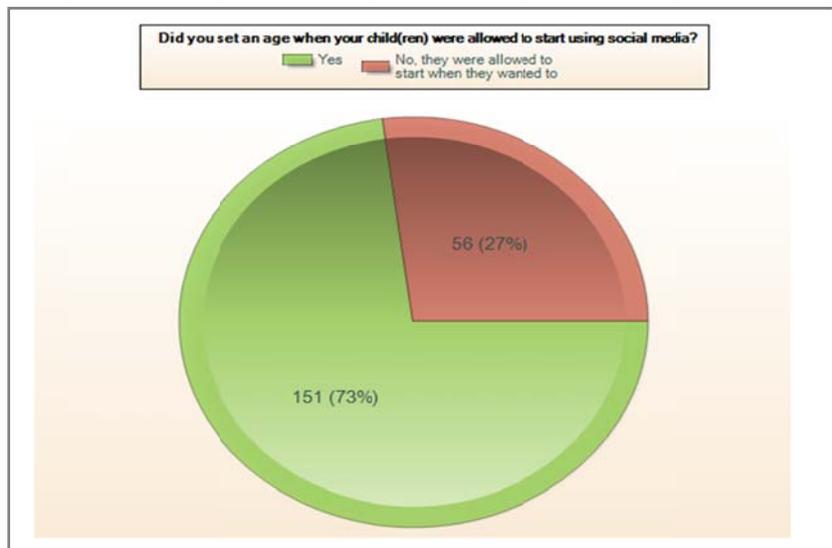
³ Wall Street Journal, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303506404577444711741019238.html>

Clearly, this question indicates a growing need for adult supervision of all electronic devices and accounts.



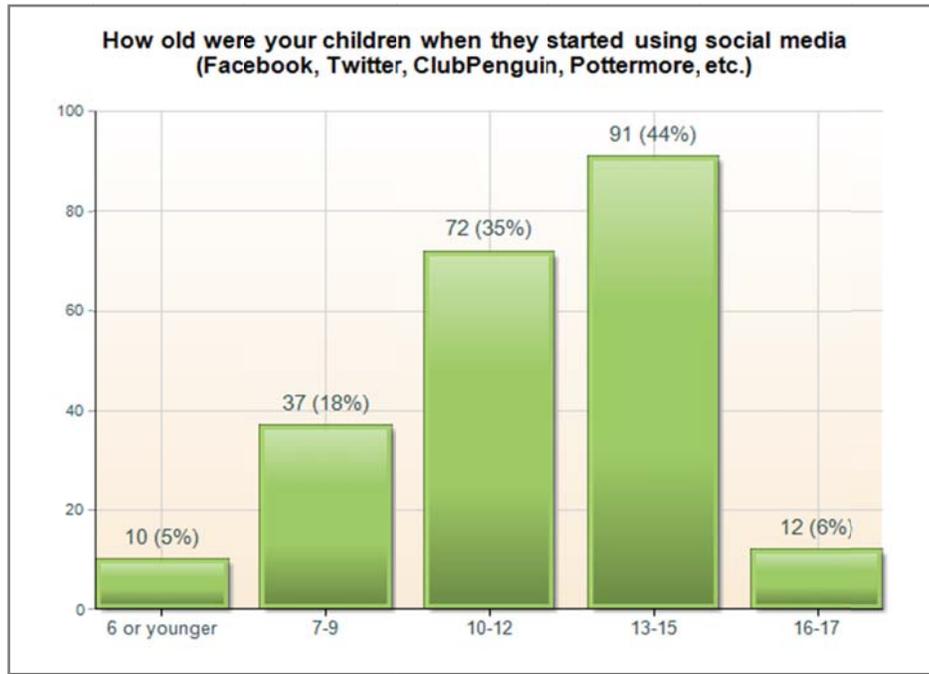
Q3: Did you set an age when your children were allowed to start using social media? (N=207)

In order to measure parental policies regarding social media practices, the study asked if parents had set an age at which their children were allowed to begin using social media. Nearly three quarters of parents had implemented such a policy. The remaining 27 percent stated that they did not have a rule about how old their children must be to start using social media and their children began using it at an indeterminate age. The ITRC is encouraged by the fact that a large majority of parents took the action to set an age for participation in social media activities. However, it begs the question: If almost 1/4th of the respondents did not set an age for allowing social networking, did these parents also not feel the need to monitor their children's activities?



Q4: How old were your children when they started using social media? (Facebook, Twitter, ClubPenguin, Pottermore, etc.)

Five percent of the parents surveyed indicated that their children started using social media at 6 years of age or younger. It should be noted that social media sites were not limited to the big three (Facebook, Twitter, You Tube) but also included sites created for children such as ClubPenguin, Pottermore, etc. The majority of children began using social media before the age of 13. However, the largest single group became active on social networks between the ages of 13 and 15 (44 percent).



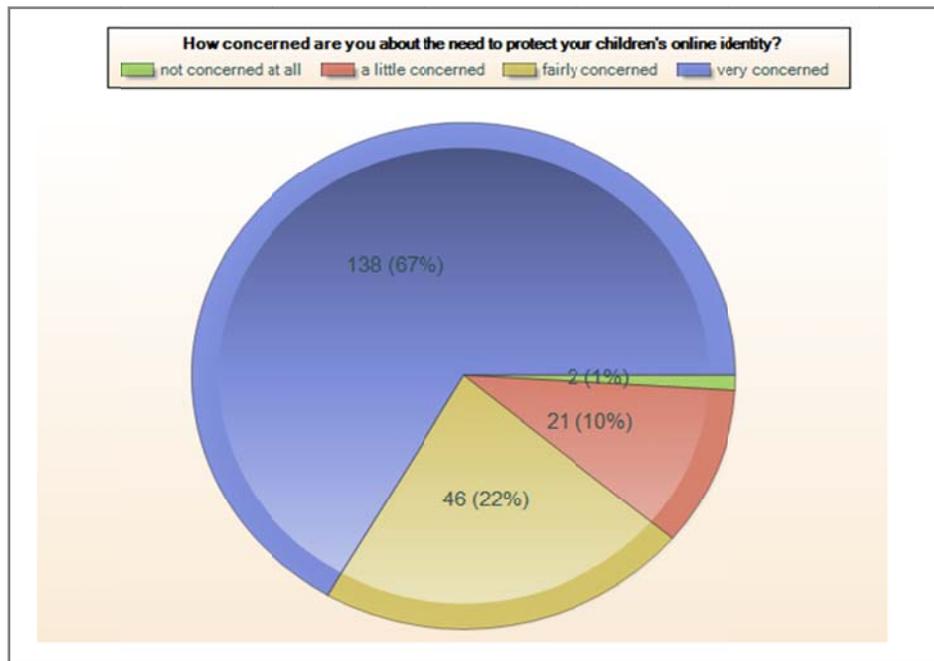
Q5: How concerned are you about the need to protect your children's online identity?

Only 1 percent of the parents surveyed stated they were not concerned at all about the need to protect their children's online identity. Conversely, 67 percent were very concerned and an additional 22 percent were fairly concerned. The remaining 10 percent of respondents indicated that they were a little concerned regarding the need to protect their children's online identity. These results reflect an overwhelming amount of concern on the part of parents about their children's online identity.

The findings of a survey done by *MediaSmarts* in Canada mirror this finding⁴. The study stated that "The parents we spoke with were beleaguered by fear of danger and exhausted by the burden of constant vigilance. Although the exact nature of that danger is poorly defined, many parents told us that surveillance is now equated with good parenting..." This seemed to be the mindset of the parents who participated in the ITRC survey, as well.

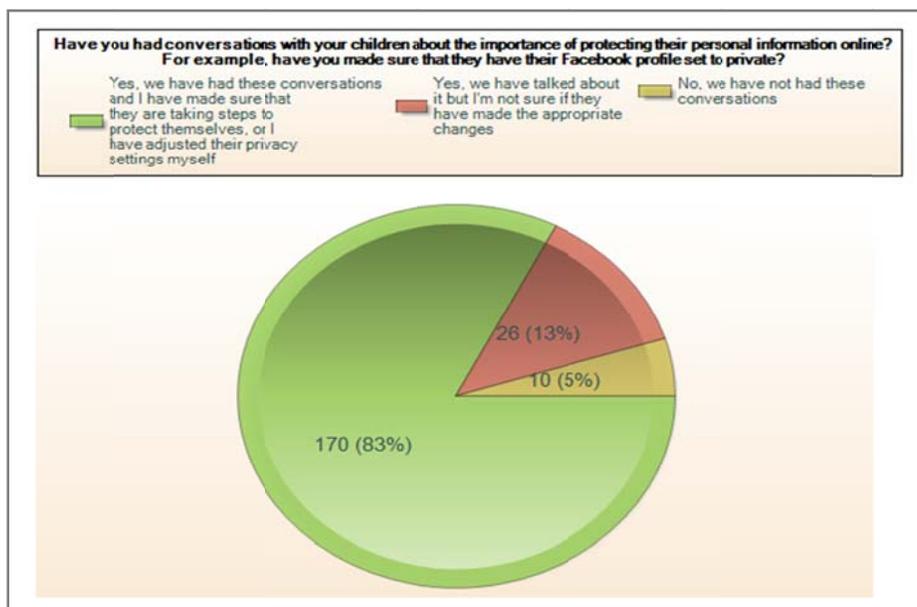
Unfortunately, the ITRC has long recognized a disparity between concern and behavioral change and action among consumers. So, subsequent questions were asked to further understand if parents are taking action to promote online safety practices in their children.

⁴ Valerie Steeves PhD (2012), *Young Canadians in a Wired World Phase III*. Ottawa: MediaSmarts



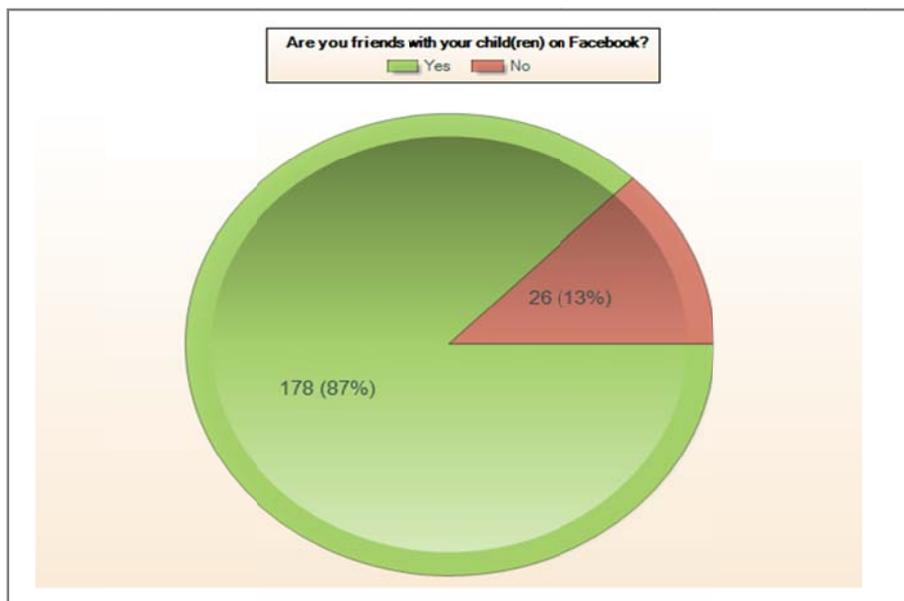
Q6: Have you had conversations with your children about the importance of protecting their personal information online? For example, have you made sure that they have their Facebook profile is set to private?

It is notable that the parents who participated in our study show a large commitment to not only discussing privacy issues with their children, but also checking to see that appropriate actions are taken. 82 percent of these parents stated that they had communicated with their children about how to protect their private information online or they had affected their children's privacy settings themselves. 18 percent of the respondents were not sure of their children's privacy settings, although 12.6 percent had at least had a conversation regarding protecting personal information online.



Q7: Are you friends with your children on Facebook?

Approximately 7 out of 8 parents indicated that they are “friends” with their children on Facebook. This is certainly a good starting point and indicates an interest by the parent in their children’s online activities. However, as is seen in the following questions, this method is not a fail-proof method in monitoring their children’s online activities.

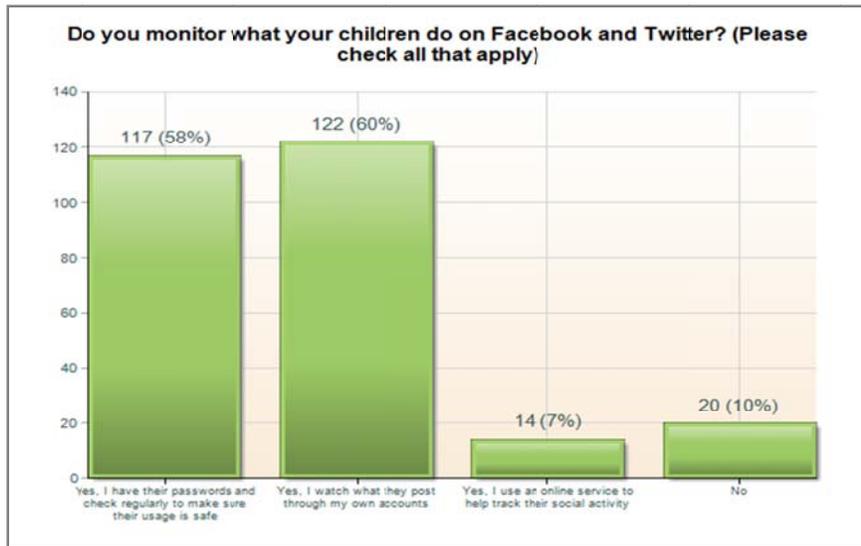


Q8: Do you monitor what your children do on Facebook and Twitter? (Please check all that apply)

The ITRC was interested in not only how many parents monitored their children’s social media activity, but how they did so. This led to the finding that 58 percent of parents took a strong stance of monitoring their children’s social networking accounts by obtaining their children’s passwords and checking regularly to make sure their usage is safe. Sixty percent of parents monitored what their children posted through their own accounts, which is interesting considering that 90 percent of survey respondents stated that they knew their children could block posts from their parents, even if they were “friends”⁵. Unfortunately, 10 percent did nothing at all to monitor what their children did on Facebook and Twitter.

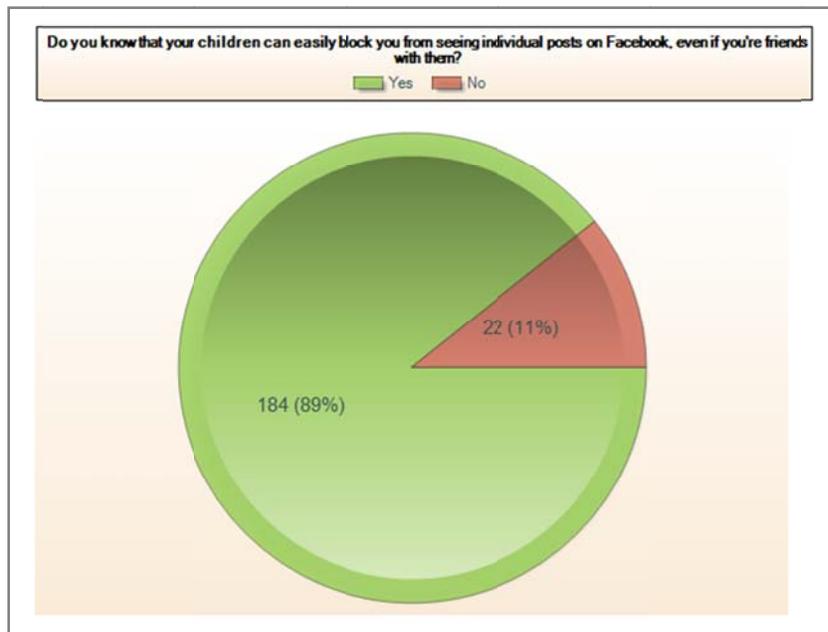
Still, this response indicates, in general, that parents will take appropriate actions to safeguard their children.

⁵ Survey Question 9



Q9: Do you know that your children can easily block you from seeing individual posts on Facebook, even if you're friends with them?

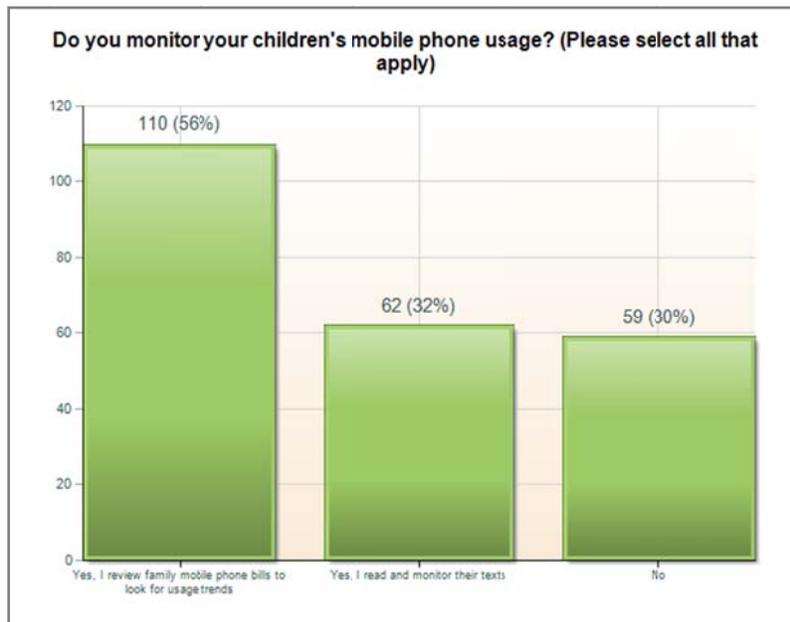
In a follow-up to question 8 of the survey, respondents were asked if they understood that a child can block their posts from being seen by a parent, regardless as to whether they are “friends” or not. Nearly 90 percent of respondents were aware of this setting which is available on Facebook. This could also be seen as evidence that parents understand current Facebook privacy settings, which is an important variable in the protection of their children online.



Q10: Do you monitor your children’s mobile phone usage? (Please select all that apply)

While 30 percent of respondents did not monitor their children’s mobile phone usage, the majority did at least review the phone bill and about 1/3 also read and monitored their children’s text messages. This is in line with a study AT&T published in June of 2012 which stated that 66 percent of children said that

their parents had rules for their cell phone usage⁶. The same study showed that the average age at which children received their first cell phones was 12.1 years old. Pairing all of this information together leaves us with a disturbing reality that many young children are allowed unmonitored access to mobile devices which could potentially harm their safety. The ITRC study showed that only 32 percent of parents read and monitored their children's texts. Again, if we look the AT&T study, which states that more than 1 in 5 children has received a bullying text, this gives a clear picture of need for improved interaction between children and parents about mobile device usage.

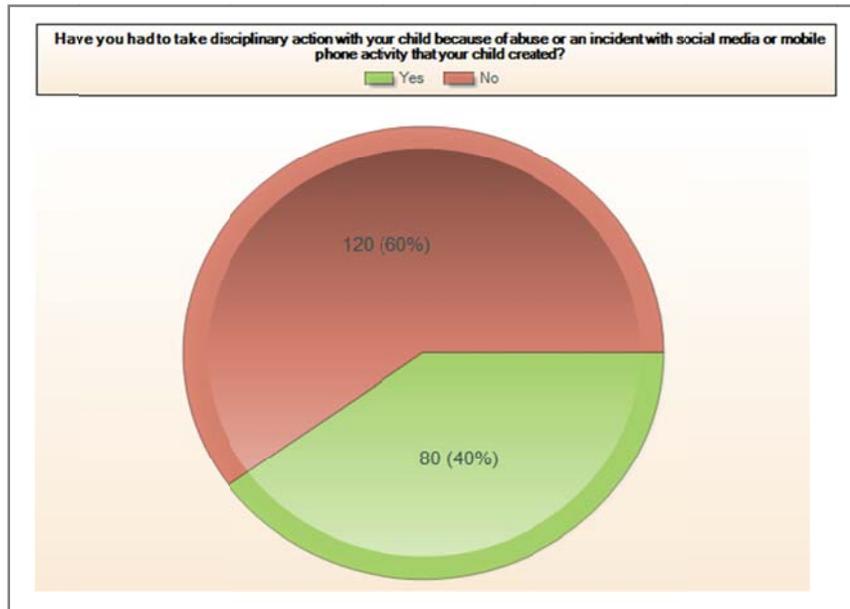


Q11: Have you had to take disciplinary action with your child because of abuse or an incident with social media or mobile phone activity that your child created?

Just as in any social environment in which children are present, the sphere of social media and mobile devices carries with it the risk of misuse. The ITRC was interested in how many parents had taken disciplinary actions towards their children for such misuse or abuse. Sixty percent of parents said that had taken such disciplinary actions while forty percent said that they had not. We do know that abuses are occurring and becoming more common in children's cell phone usage. In a study published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior showed that more than 18 percent of high school males had sent sexually explicit cell phone pictures and over half of these boys had received sexually explicit cell phone pictures. The numbers were slightly lower for females of the same age⁷. These facts paint a picture in which parents will need to have both monitoring ability and disciplinary plans in place for mobile device and social media abuse by their children.

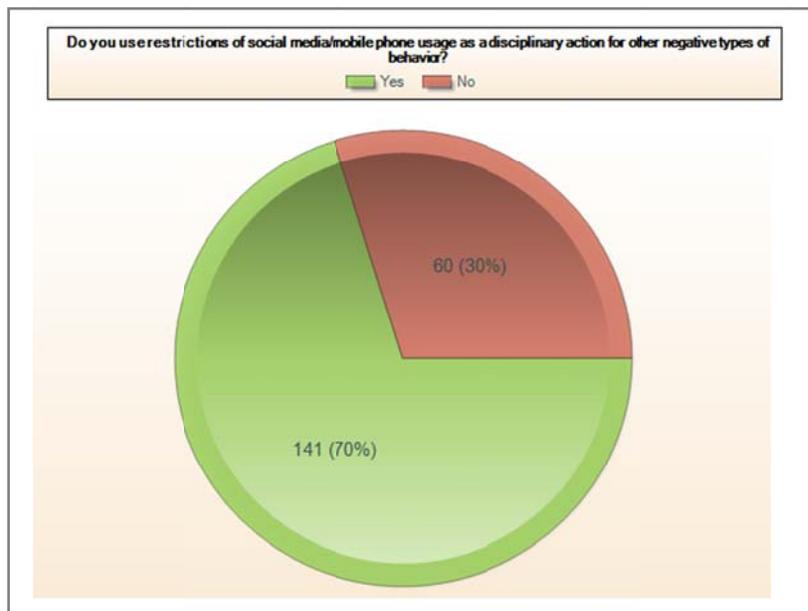
⁶ AT&T. (2012, June 12). *Safety Survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.att.com/gen/press-room?pid=22917>

⁷ Strassberg, D. S. (2012). *Sexting by High School Students: An Exploratory and Descriptive Study*. Springer.



Q12: Do you use restrictions of social media/mobile phone usage as a disciplinary action for other negative types of behavior?

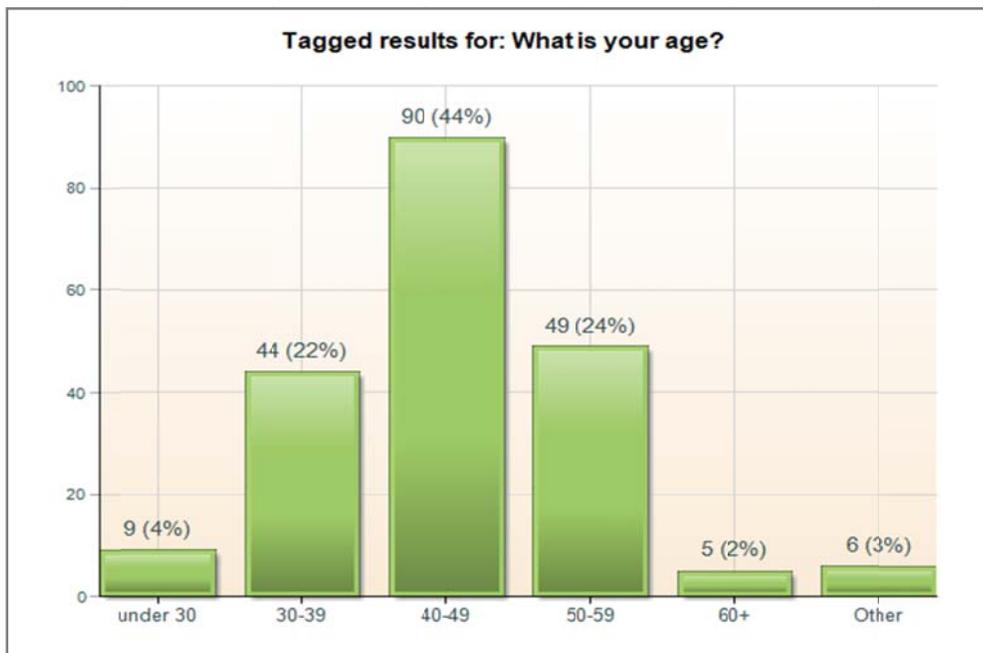
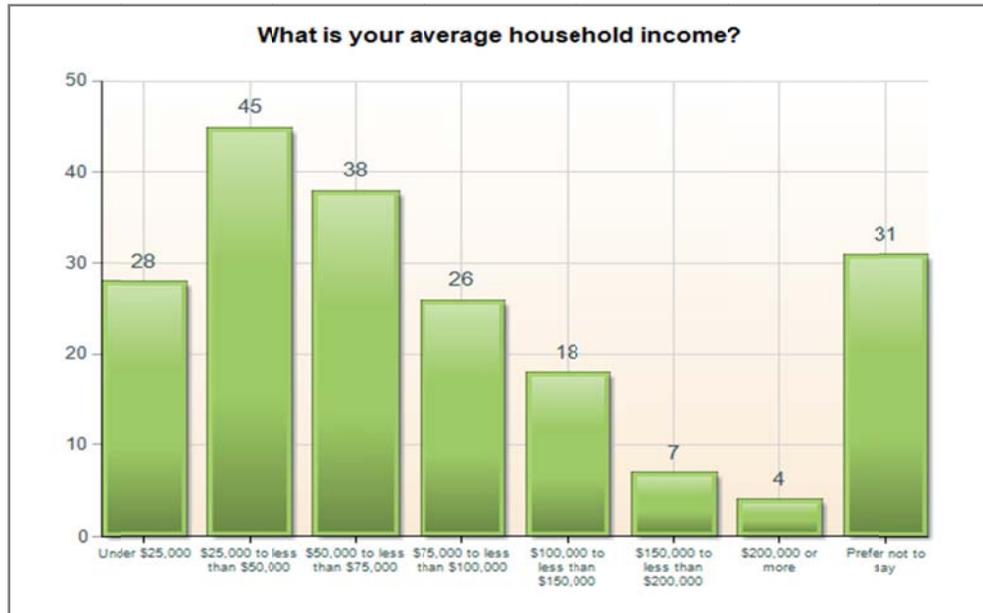
In question 12, we reversed the situation of question 11 and asked if social media or mobile device usage restriction was used as a disciplinary tool for other negative behaviors. We found that 70 percent of parents had used restrictions of social media or mobile device usage as disciplinary actions for their children. The ITRC believes that restrictions of social media / mobile phone usage as a disciplinary tool for negative behaviors not related to social media or mobile phone usage will continue to be used by parents.



As with any study, it is important to know the demographics of the participants. We were able to gather the income level and age of those parents who participated. The most common age of participants was 40 to 49 years old (44 percent). The second largest age groups were 30 to 39 and 50 to 59. Two percent

of the participants were older than 60 while 4 percent were under the age of 30. Three percent of participants placed themselves in the “Other” category.

While 31 of the 197 participants who answered our question about income level preferred not to release information about their annual income, we were able to gather that 45 of the participants had an average household income level of \$25,000 to \$50,000. Twenty-eight of the participants had an average household income of less than \$25,000 and only 4 participants had an average household income of more than \$200,000.



Conclusion

Overall, what the ITRC study shows is that parents are recognizing the importance of their involvement in their children's usage of social media and mobile devices. There is a high level of awareness and concern by parents, and that appears to be generally followed by concrete actions to monitor their children. Though a small percentage of parents are not yet active in their children's online activity, there is no doubt that current trends of younger and younger engagement will push parents to become more involved. The ITRC found significant agreement with our findings in other studies which have been published about this topic.

A report released by the American Academy for Pediatrics talked about the rise of social media use by children and how prevalent it was becoming. "For this reason, it is important that parents become aware of the nature of social media sites, given that not all of them are healthy environments for children and adolescents. Pediatricians are in a unique position to help families understand these sites and to encourage healthy use and urge parents to monitor for potential problems with cyber-bullying, "Facebook depression," sexting, and exposure to inappropriate content."⁸ When children under the age of 6 have access to mobile devices and social networking sites, it is clear that adult supervision is necessary. Communication with children at a young age is just as important as discussions parents currently have with children regarding other social matters.

Monitoring of children's social media and mobile device usage is an important tool for parents who want to make sure that their child is using safe practices in their online communications. Children need the supervision of a parent so that when they make mistakes, as they will in any social sphere, they can be corrected and directed in a positive manner. And, it is extremely important to realize that this new technology is nothing to be taken lightly. A large percentage of children already have access to social media and mobile devices, and these numbers will only increase. These activities are no passing fad. Parents and children must have clear communication, strong usage guidelines and an understanding of the risks to their safety in the social media and mobile device sphere in order to create positive social experiences.

Methodology

The survey was made available online to consumers from April 27th 2012 to May 31st 2012. It should be noted that participants for this survey were contacted by use of Internet (including the ITRC website), and social media channels. This approach may have had a filtering effect upon the type of respondent, and therefore their response. The survey was also deployed ITRC social networks outreach, including those on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. Additionally, the survey was announced through the ITRC blog and shared by ITRC partners and employees. A great deal of effort was also made to inform consumers regarding the availability of the survey through cybersecurity, privacy and parenting blogs.

The total number of participants for this survey totaled 207. It should be noted that the survey was only available for completion for parents. Those tentative respondents without children were deferred after the first question and unable to complete the survey. This made the available respondent pool much smaller than previous ITRC surveys, which had produced a much wider demographic target. Completion of the survey and submission of email contact information directly entered individuals into a sweepstakes for which the prize was a \$100.00 gift card.

⁸ The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families; PEDIATRICS Vol. 127 No. 4 April 1, 2011 pp. 800 -804

Definitions

Social Network: A social network is defined as a web-based service that allows individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.⁹

⁹ boyd, d. m., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), article 11. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>