WATCH WHERE YOU STEP

Students' Attitudes Towards Their Digital Footprints

EVERFI

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Our mission at EverFi is to prepare students to leverage unprecedented access to technology in a responsible and safe way.

Through online education, data and services, we help teachers to prepare their students to thrive in an emerging global economy, fueled by rapid innovation, in which there is increased demand for STEM skills.

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With the widespread adoption and integration of information and communication technology (ICT) including consumer applications, cloud-based software, and wearable technology, along with increasing data processing and storage capacities, leading thinkers believe that the world is entering a new age in which data has the power to boost the economy and support innovation.[1] As the world enters this new era, organizations may consider collecting and using data from youth in ways that may be unfamiliar to young people or their guardians. When organizations collect data from users, traces of their identities, commonly called "footprints," or trails of data that "exist on the Internet as a result of their online activity," are being stored.[2] This collection of information exposes users to the risk of losing control of information they might want to be kept private.

While the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protect the information of children under 13 and students of all ages in educational settings, it is crucial that older children and teenagers, in particular, are better prepared for the digital risks they face. To empower teenagers to live as well-informed citizens in a changing world, they must gain an understanding of their digital footprints.

To determine where there is room to engage students further in the topic of digital footprints, EverFi researchers have analyzed students' responses to optional pre-course survey questions related to data privacy. Pre- and post-course surveys are used to measure how effective EverFi's digital citizenship course, Ignition, is at impacting students' digital attitudes and preparedness. Based on this analysis, students demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of their responsibility to protect their private information and the steps they should take to set up privacy settings. However, there is room for further education on students' digital footprints. This report ultimately recommends that teachers facilitate classroom discussions alongside the online learning experience and make this topic an instructional priority.

"To empower teenagers to live as well-informed citizens in a changing world, they must gain an understanding of their digital footprints"

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1 World Economic Forum and INSEAD. The Global Information Technology Report 2016: Innovating in the Digital Economy. Retrieved October 11, 2016, from Wall Street Journal Web site: http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/GITR2016.pdf.
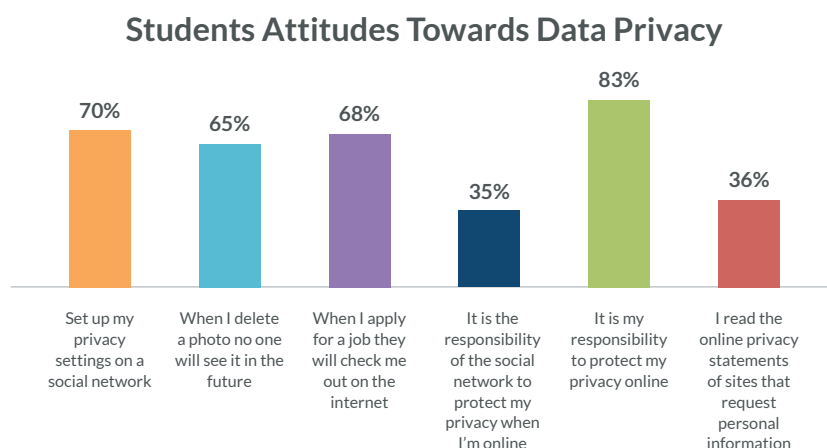
2 "Digital Footprint" [Def. 1]. (n.d.) In Oxford Dictionaries, Retrieved December 6, 2016, from Oxford Dictionaries Web site: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com.

An Investigation of Students' Attitudes Towards Data Privacy

In the 2015-2016 school year, 448,717 6th-9th graders spent over one million hours engaging with Ignition content. This report presents an analysis of 71% of the students' responses to optional pre-course survey questions relating to data privacy.

Students responded to six of Ignition's survey statements that are related to data privacy:

1. I am prepared to set up my privacy settings on a social network

2. I agree that when I delete a photo, no one will ever see it in the future

3. I agree that when I apply for a job, they will check me out on the Internet

4. I agree that it is the responsibility of the social network provider to protect my privacy when I'm online social networking

5. I agree that it is my responsibility to protect my privacy online

6. I agree that I read the online privacy statements of sites that request personal information

"Only **36%** of students reported that they read the online privacy statements information"

Students Attitudes Towards Data Privacy

Set up my privacy settings on a social network	When I delete a photo no one will see it in the future	When I apply for a job they will check me out on the internet	It is the responsibility of the social network to protect my privacy when I'm online	It is my responsibility to protect my privacy online	I read the online privacy statements of sites that request personal information
70%	65%	68%	35%	83%	36%

Students can respond to each of the six likert questions with values between 1 and 7, with 1 representing "strongly disagree," 4 representing neither agree or disagree, and 7 representing "strongly agree" for questions 1-5. For question 6, 1 represents "very unprepared" and 7 represents "very prepared." Percentages represent the percentage of total survey respondents who agree or feel prepared.

The majority of students started the course agreeing to the statement, "it is my responsibility to protect my privacy online" (83%) and feeling prepared to "set up my privacy settings on a social network" (70%). Fewer students, 65% of them, agreed to the statement, "when I delete a photo no one will see it in the future." Additionally, only 36% of students agreed with the statement, "I read the online privacy statements of sites that request personal information."

EverFi's data indicate that while students agree that they have agency over their privacy and know to set up their privacy settings, they are not fully aware of how the information that they share is being collected, used, or distributed. Merely 36% of students reported that they read online privacy statements; and to put this statistic into context, close to 52% of people agreed incorrectly in a University of Pennsylvania researcher's study that "when a company posts a privacy policy, it ensures that the company keeps confidential all the information it collects on users," according to a Pew Research Center report.[3]

Students have a sophisticated understanding of their responsibility to protect their private information and the steps they should take to set up privacy settings. However, there is room for students to understand better the consequences of leaving digital footprints online since organizations may use or share their information in ways that they may disapprove of. Co-curricular instruction and more in-depth classroom discussions can help students recognize how all of the "steps" taken in the digital world can lead to the extrapolation of information that would normally be private. Educators have a unique opportunity to talk about how students can approach living in the changing, digital world, so as to protect themselves from some of the unique risks that exist online.

Conclusion

As we live in an increasingly digital world, we need educators to help students to think critically about digital footprints. EverFi's Ignition gives students practical advice on how to manage their digital lives. Student survey data indicate that while students are aware of what information they should provide online, they are not fully cognizant of the implications of how data is collected, used, and shared.

"Educators have a unique opportunity to talk about how students can approach living in the changing, digital world"

3 Smith, A. (2014). Half of Online Americans Don't Know What a Privacy Policy Is. Retrieved December 2, 2016, from Pew Research Center: http://www.pewinternet.org.

By discussing real world examples in school, students can connect with topics that they learn about in Ignition on an individual level, increasing their awareness of how data can be collected, used, shared, and protected.

To facilitate discussions on digital footprints, teachers can do the following:

1. Ask students to identify examples of sites they use that are enhanced by the information they post.

2. Read and interpret a privacy policy of a popular site with students.

3. Lead an activity in which students compare what they think their digital footprints look like with what they want their digital footprints to look like.

4. Share newer tools that students can use to protect their online identities like DoNotTrackMe (now known as Blur) or Privacy Badger. 74% of people surveyed in a Pew Research Study reported not to have adopted or not to have known about such privacy enhancing plug-ins.[4]

EverFi wants students both to gain the foundational knowledge needed on the critical topics that EverFi's courses address and to apply knowledge gained towards healthier attitudes and behaviors. Ignition – Digital Literacy & ResponsibilityTM has been provided to middle school teachers and students since 2010. The goal of the course is to help students think critically about their digital footprints and provide guidance towards ensuring they protect information that should be kept private. The course teaches students to use technology and digital media responsibly, protect their information online, and practice other digital literacy skills. Teachers can take all four of the recommended steps, reinforcing content taught in Ignition.

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4 Rainie, L. & Madden, M. Americans' Privacy Strategies Post-Snowden. Retrieved December 2, 2016, from Pew Research Center: http://www.pewinternet.org.