

PRESS RELEASE

Filipino schoolchildren are active netizens – AIJC survey

Filipino schoolchildren are computer literate, as almost three-fourths (74%) have access to the Internet. Schoolchildren in the Visayas and Metro Manila have greater access than their counterparts in the Cordilleras and Mindanao.

Maintaining and visiting social networking sites (SNS) is emerging as the number one online activity. Almost 9 of 10 schoolchildren who connect to the Net are members of *Friendster*.

Online gaming is another favorite with almost 8 of 10 schoolchildren who connect to the net play online games. There are more grade school pupils than high school students who play online.

These are among the major findings of the survey, *Internet Access and Use by Filipino Schoolchildren*, conducted by the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC). The study was commissioned by UNICEF. According to AIJC president Ramon R. Tuazon, UNICEF will use the study in coming up with policy and action agenda in creating a child-friendly cyberspace.

The survey was conducted from February to April 2009 in Metro Manila and selected cities and municipalities representing Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The respondents are schoolchildren 10-12 years old in elementary school and 13-17 years old in high school, from both public and private schools.

One-fourth or 26 percent of schoolchildren, high school and elementary, are non-users of the Internet. Of these non-users, most are in the elementary (52%) and female (55%). Among the prominent reasons cited for not using the Internet were “no Internet connection at home/school” (58%) and “don’t know how to use the computer” (51). Unaffordability and parental disapproval (both 26%) were also cited as reasons.

There is no gender bias in access to Internet as there is an equal split of 50:50 between male and female Internet users in all areas, except for Mindanao where more girls access the Internet than boys.

Filipino schoolchildren are “late” users, as majority first used the Internet between 8-11 years old, with Metro Manila and Visayas children as early users (2-9 years old) compared to Luzon and Mindanao schoolchildren. Boys are earlier users than girls.

Internet cafés provide the venue for bridging the digital divide, as 8 of 10 Internet users go online in Internet cafés. Grade-schoolers access the Internet more at home than in Internet cafés probably because the former may be perceived by parents and guardians as safer and more secure.

Schoolchildren allot a significant amount of their *baon* (allowance) or savings to Internet use, with almost half (46%) spending more than P300 monthly for their Internet habit.

Schoolchildren use the Internet for e-mailing, connecting with friends, and participating in e-groups and networks. *Yahoo* is the most frequently used e-mail account. The top website often visited is *Friendster*, while *Google* and *Yahoo* are the most frequently used for web search.

Among online schoolchildren, the incidence of downloading images and music at 77 percent and 70 percent, respectively, is slightly higher compared with uploading images and music at 71 percent and 69 percent, respectively.

Friendster is the most frequently used site for uploading music and images, while *YouTube* is the choice for videos. IMEEM and MP3 are the favorite sites for downloading music; *Friendster*, *Google* and *Yahoo* for images, *Y8.com* and *Yahoo* for games; and *YouTube* and *Lime Wire* for videos.

As expected, SNS membership is highest in Metro Manila, recorded at 88 percent for both elementary and high school students. More males than females visit their accounts – they seem to be excited in keeping track of how many new “friends” are added to their account.

Friendster is the most popular because it was the pioneer in social networking and is very user-friendly. The percentage of *Friendster* users in Metro Manila is lower compared to the other survey areas. Curiously, while *Friendster* requires 14 years as the minimum age for membership, over one-third (34%) of those who own *Friendster* accounts are grade school pupils or have ages less than the age requirement.

The top five favorite online games are the following: *Audition* (17%), *Cabal Online* (12%), *Ran/Ran Online* (12%), *DOTA (Defense of the Ancient)* (11%), and *Counter Strike* (9%). The top three best-liked online games varied from area to area. *Audition* is the top choice for Metro Manila. *DOTA* and *Counter Strike* are in the top three in two survey areas.

There are more grade school pupils than high school students who play online. Surprisingly, there are more girls than boys in elementary grades playing online games. But among the older schoolchildren, there are more boys than girls playing online. There are more public school students who play online games than those enrolled in private schools.

Most schoolchildren (3 out of 5) also go online to chat with friends and family/relatives. The incidence of chatting online is highest in Metro Manila and lowest in Mindanao. Fortunately, most do not chat with strangers, perhaps aware of the dangers of doing so. Private school students chat more than their counterparts from public schools.

Wikipedia is popular among elementary and high school students although it is visited more by the latter. A little over two-thirds (68%) of young netizens use the *Wiki* primarily for schoolwork. Blogging is relatively less attractive to schoolchildren than the other Internet applications. As expected, high school students blog more often than elementary pupils.

The study came up with proposed policy and action programs that will broaden Internet access, protect the safety and security of young users and promote Internet use for the development of children. A major recommendation was for government to provide computers with Internet access in all public schools and for Congress to immediately pass laws on anti-child pornography and children's online privacy protection. The study also recommended that parents and teachers need media literacy skills to properly guide their children on responsible Internet use.