

**A Study on Internet Access and Use by Filipino Schoolchildren
by the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication**

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Filipino schoolchildren are computer literate, as almost three-fourths (74%) have access to the Internet. But schoolchildren in the Visayas and Metro Manila, or 9 out of 10, have greater access than their counterparts in the Cordilleras and Mindanao (see **Table 1. Profile of Internet Users**).

Maintaining and visiting social networking sites (SNS) is emerging as the number one online activity of Filipino schoolchildren. 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 connected to the Net playing 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.

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. For the Metro Manila survey, a stratified proportional random sample was drawn using the enrolment data from the Department of Education (DepED) as basis.

In Metro Manila, sites included the cities of Manila, Mandaluyong, Pasay and Quezon. The study covered Baguio City and Benguet for Luzon, Iloilo City and Oton for the Visayas and Marawi City and Marantao, Lanao Sur for Mindanao.

Elementary schoolchildren have less access to the Internet compared to high school students,. Internet non-users are mostly female children enrolled in public elementary schools. Majority (51%) of schoolchildren reported “not knowing how to use the computer” as reason for not using the Internet. Computer classes are not available in public elementary schools compared with private schools (see **Table 2. Profile of Internet Users**).

According to the AIJC study, the high level of computer illiteracy should be a priority concern since “competitiveness” and “survival” of children in today’s Knowledge Society is greatly dependent on digital literacy. Access and appropriate use of the Internet can provide children a good head start in child development especially if they are exposed to child-friendly websites.

The non-use of Internet can also be due to unaffordability. Computers may be accessible to all (especially through Internet cafes) but many may not have the money to pay computer rent in Internet cafes at P15 to P20 per hour.

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. This may be because computers are considered also as toys and young boys are more attracted to gadgets than girls. Also, earlier versions of online games were intended for males.

Internet access is lowest among schoolchildren from Luzon (58%) and Mindanao (47%) particularly among the poorest regions and provinces. These areas also have the least access to basic social services resulting in socioeconomic development below the national standard.

Internet cafes provide the venue for bridging the digital divide, as 8 of 10 Internet users access the Internet in Internet cafes. Seven of 10 said they also access the Internet in their homes using broadband connection (**Table 3. Place Where Internet is Accessed**)

Grade-schoolers access the Internet more at home than in Internet cafes probably because the former may be perceived by parents and guardians as safer and more secure. In contrast, high school boys go to Internet cafés probably because there are less restrictions and they are able to socialize more with their peer groups.

Computers are becoming a regular feature in homes with 40 percent of Internet users reporting having at least one computer unit at home. Although this may not necessarily mean ownership, the increasing number of computer households is recognition of the importance of computers as a tool for communication, education, entertainment, etc. Still, a significant proportion (42%) has no computer at home.

The growing accessibility of broadband (70%) can be attributed to the declining cost of broadband connection.

Schoolchildren are now allotting a significant amount of their *baon* (allowance) or savings to Internet use. This can mean they scrimp on other items such as food and clothing to be able to visit their favorite Internet café. About a fifth spend from P100 to P300 monthly for their Internet habit.

Schoolchildren use the Internet for communication purposes specifically for sending or receiving e-mail, 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 because they are the first and more popular search engines (see **Table 4. Purposes of Using the Internet**)

The Internet is recognized as a potent education tool especially among elementary schoolchildren. They recognize the educational value of the Internet as reflected in their use of Internet for schoolwork.

Filipino children are becoming more “independent” in terms of their content needs, as uploading and downloading are popular activities although the latter enjoys a slight advantage. The incidence of uploading images and music among online schoolchildren is 71 percent and 69 percent, respectively, compared with downloading images and music at 77 percent and 70 percent, respectively. In addition to being techno-literate, many uploading/downloading sites are very user-friendly even for young children.

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. (Please refer to **Table 5. Sites Used to Upload Music, Images, and Videos** and **Table 6. Sites Used to Download Music, Images, Videos, Games, and Documents.**)

According to the AIJC study, greater capability of schoolchildren to upload and download materials enhances self-expression and creativity, enables them to link with others who share the same interests, and therefore widens opportunities for sharing and networking. Filipino children are no longer just consumers but producers as well – now referred to as “prosumers.”

That Filipinos are among the highest SNS membership in the world attests to their high “social quotient.” The reasons cited by the respondents for participating in online social networking are “to meet new people,” “to keep in touch with relatives/friends,” and “to search for old friends.”

As expected, SNS membership is highest in Metro Manila recorded at 88 percent for both elementary and high school students who go online. 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 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. Lately, some are migrating to other networks as *Friendster* is perceived as the SNS of the so-called “jologs.” Curiously, while *Friendster* requires 14 years as the minimum age for membership, a number of children less than this age reported owning a *Friendster* account. Over one-third (34%) of those who own *Friendster* accounts are grade school pupils. Among the possible explanations are they lied about their age or older relatives and friends created the account for them (refer to **Table 7. Social Network Sites Hosting Respondents' Account**).

The popularity of online games can be attributed to visual and interactive characteristics of online games. 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 (see **Table 8. Favorite Online Games**).

There are more grade school pupils than high school students who play online. This is probably because high school respondents have other social activities besides playing online games. Surprisingly, there are more girls than boys in elementary grade playing online games, as the latter may have other social activities outside the house while girls may opt to play online at home. But among the older schoolchildren, there are more boys than girls playing online. Incidence of online gaming is highest for Luzon and lowest for Mindanao. In Metro Manila, Visayas and Mindanao, more males play online games than females.

There are more public school students who play online games than those enrolled in private schools. A possible explanation is that the former have more leisure time as private school students mostly stay the whole day in school unlike in many public schools. Also, students enrolled in private schools come from relatively economically well-off families that can afford to provide their children other digital toys such as iPods, MP3/MP4, PlayStation, Internet-capable cellphones, etc.

The AIJC study observed that many of the favorite online games involve “violence”. While playing online games contributes to visual-spatial skills, some psychosocial researches confirm that violent games can increase children’s aggression.

E-mail is not as attractive as the other web applications to both elementary and high school children as it is not frequently used. E-mail may be seen as “too formal” compared to SMS messaging (texting), *Yahoo Messenger*, etc. Respondents interviewed said they use e-mail only for school-related activities.

Most online schoolchildren (3 out of 5) also go online chat with friends and family/relatives. The incidence of chatting online is highest in Metro Manila and lowest in Mindanao. Over one-third (37%) of online chatters chat online twice to thrice a week. Fortunately, most do not chat with strangers, perhaps aware of the dangers of doing so. The high incidence of online chatting among elementary and high school students can be attributed to the availability of online chatting in many web applications. Online chatting is now facilitated by online games, chat rooms, and instant messaging clients such as *Yahoo Messenger*, *Google Talk*, *Skype*, and *Window Live Messenger* (see **Table 9. Topics Discussed During Online Chatting**).

Private school students chat more than their counterpart from public schools. This can be attributed to affordability. Online chatters said they chat with relatives and friends. It is possible that students from private schools chat with their relatives abroad (parents and siblings) who support their schooling.

Less than half (43%) of online chatters use gadgets such as webcam and headset mic although these gadgets are now found in many Internet cafes. However, availing of these gadgets would mean additional cost.

Incidence of accessing chatrooms is still low as nearly half (46%) of respondents access or join chatrooms/forums which serve as venue for bonding among family members and friends as reflected in topics discussed, such as family, movies and celebrities, love and relationship, and education. Metro Manila and Visayas respondents put movies and celebrities and education among their top choices in terms of topics discussed. *Yahoo/Yahoo Chat/Yahoo Messenger* was the chatroom accessed most frequently (refer to **Table 10. Topics Discussed in Chat Rooms/Forums**).

Wikipedia is popular among elementary and high school students although it is visited more by the latter. A little over two-thirds (68%) of respondents use the *Wiki*. It is used primarily for education purposes whether to do school work or to research for information not related to schooling.

While the use of *Wikipedia* for school-related tasks is welcome, the AIJC report recommended that children have to be educated on how best to validate content or verify accuracy. There are other risks related to online content such as age inappropriateness, violence, incorrectness, illegality (e.g., pornography), and copyright infringement.

Blogging is relatively less attractive to schoolchildren than the other Internet applications. This is unfortunate, according to the researchers, as “responsible” blogging can have many positive effects on child development, like enhancing writing skills, reasoning, self-expression and critical thinking. As expected, high school students blog more often than elementary students.

The few who blog cited the following as reasons for blogging: “to share my experiences,” “to express my thoughts,” “it is fun,” and “to improve my writing skills.”

In terms of frequency of engaging in various Internet activities, such as sending and receiving e-mail, visiting and updating one’s SNS account, visiting sites of friends, playing online, chatting online, and writing and commenting on blogs, more respondents claimed doing all these activities twice to thrice a week, an indication of heavy use among the young netizens.

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 elementary and high 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.

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Table 1. Incidence of Internet Usage

	TOTAL	S U R V E Y A R E A			
		M.MANILA	LUZON	VISAYAS	MINDANAO
Base: All Respondents	(918)	(418)	(168)	(146)	(186)
	%	%	%	%	%
Use the Internet	74	88	58	90	47
Do not use the Internet	26	12	42	10	53

Table 2. Profile of Internet Users

	TOTAL	S U R V E Y A R E A			
		M.MANILA	LUZON	VISAYAS	MINDANAO
Base: Number Answering	(683)	(366)	(98)	(132)	(87)
	%	%	%	%	%
Gender					
Male	50	51	52	51	44
Female	50	49	48	49	56
Age Group					
9-12	41	44	41	42	30
13-15	45	44	46	45	47
16-18	14	12	13	13	23
Grade Level					
4	11	13	7	13	9
5	15	14	16	13	15
6	14	12	16	15	13
Year Level					
1	14	15	13	16	11
2	14	14	11	14	16
3	17	17	19	14	20
4	16	15	17	16	16
Type of School					
Public	46	61	38	45	21
Private	54	39	62	55	79

Table 3. Place Where Internet is Accessed

	TOTAL	S U R V E Y A R E A			
		M.MANILA	LUZON	VISAYAS	MINDANAO
Base: All Respondents	(683)	(366)	(98)	(132)	(87)
	%	%	%	%	%
Internet café	84	83	72	90	91
Home	59	65	56	62	34
School	32	44	8	36	10
House of relatives/friends	31	38	14	36	9
Anywhere using a mobile phone	14	17	-	17	10
Parents' office	13	19	4	11	5
Hotspot/WiFi zone	9	13	-	7	5
Public library	5	7	-	6	2

N.B. Totals exceed 100 percent due to multiple responses.

Table 4. Purposes of Using the Internet

	TOTAL	S U R V E Y A R E A			
		M.MANILA	LUZON	VISAYAS	MINDANAO
Base: All Respondents	(683)	(366)	(98)	(132)	(87)
	%	%	%	%	%
Education and Information					
Schoolwork	83	79	84	94	83
Non-school related needs	54	50	45	74	53
News and information	41	47	22	51	23
Current events	32	32	26	45	17
Communication					
Sending/receiving e-mail messages	89	91	88	80	94
Connecting with friends	88	100	65	79	79
Participating in e-groups and networks	88	92	76	89	89
Connecting with relatives	67	74	51	69	55
Sending/receiving messages	59	69	47	63	24

E-Commerce					
Buying products and services	26	9	3	-	10
Selling (advertising) products and services	3	3	-	2	3
Entertainment					
Online gaming	77	75	91	86	66
Downloading/uploading images	69	80	4	86	66
Downloading/uploading video	67	75	63	62	49
Listening to podcasts	29	39	4	36	3

N.B. Totals exceed 100 percent due to multiple responses.

Table 5. Sites Used to Upload Music, Images, and Videos

MUSIC	[473]
Friendster.com	22%
IMEEM.com	15
MP3code.com	14
IMAGES	[487]
Friendster.com	50%
Google.com	9
Photobucket.com	8
VIDEOS	[316]
YouTube.com	59%
Friendster.com	5
Limewire.com	5

Table 6. Sites Used to Download Music, Images, Videos, Games, and Documents

MUSIC	(529)
IMEEM.com	17%
MP3Code.com	17
LimeWire.com	16
Youtube.com	15
IMAGES	(476)
Friendster.com	24%
Google.com	22
Yahoo.com	22
Photobucket.com	11
GAMES	(384)
Y8.com	22%
Yahoo.com	11
Kedgeo.com	4
VIDEOS	(384)
YouTube.com	70%
LimeWire.com	5
Aimini.com	3
Yahoo.com	3
DOCUMENTS	(237)
Yahoo.com	37%
Google.com	29
Wikipedia.com	11

Table 7. Social Network Sites Hosting Respondents' Account

	S U R V E Y A R E A				
	TOTAL	M.MANILA	LUZON	VISAYAS	MINDANAO
Base: Number Answering	(604)	(336)	(74)	(117)	(77)
	%	%	%	%	%
Friendster	96	91	97	98	97
Multiply	15	34	12	10	5
Facebook	19	27	19	20	10

My Space	11	16	7	10	9
Net Log	1	2	-	1	-

N.B. Totals exceed 100 percent due to multiple responses.

Table 8. Favorite Online Games

Metro Manila	:	Audition	33 percent
		DOTA	22
		Ran/Ran Online	17
Luzon	:	Aveyond	14 percent
		Y8.com	14
		Special Forces Online	12
Visayas	:	Counter Strike	25 percent
		High Street 5	18
		Cabal Online	17
Mindanao	:	Conquer Online	23 percent
		DOTA	15
		Counter Strike	14

Table 9. Topics Discussed During Online Chatting

	TOTAL	S U R V E Y A R E A			
		M.MANILA	LUZON	VISAYAS	MINDANAO
Base: Number Answering	(431)	(257)	(58)	(81)	(35)
	%	%	%	%	%
School-related	50	85	51	29	36
Friends	29	36	32	32	15
Love and Relationship	23	31	22	14	23
Personal life/ stuff	19	10	29	-	-
Family	16	13	16	19	15
Entertainment	9	12	6	11	-
Life today	2	-	-	-	29
Others	9	10	5	11	15

N.B. Totals exceed 100 percent due to multiple responses.

Table 10. Topics Discussed in Chat Rooms/Forums

	TOTAL	SURVEY AREA			
		M.MANILA	LUZON	VISAYAS	MINDANAO
Base: Number Answering	(129)	(29)	(35)	(49)	(16)
	%	%	%	%	#
Love and relationships	43	59	29	59	26
Family	39	45	34	49	26
Education	39	55	26	54	21
Movies and celebrities	36	48	14	59	21
Games	34	52	26	39	17
Environment	32	45	14	37	-
Arts and fashion	30	41	9	40	-
Health	20	14	14	40	13
Religion	29	31	-	27	26
Sex	11	14	-	8	-

N.B. Totals exceed 100 percent due to multiple responses.