Digital socialisation: Young people's changing value orientations towards internet use between adolescence and early adulthood

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Abstract

This study investigates emerging differences amongst young people in their judgements about the benefits and risks of internet use. To ascertain how and why diverse values and practices emerge, and their implications for young people's careers and relationships, we examined influences on youth internet use over a five-year period between adolescence and early adulthood. Qualitative interviews were conducted with a subset of young Australians (n=20) who participated in the longitudinal study Social Futures and Life Pathways ('Our Lives'), in the year after high school (aged 17-18). Participants were strategically selected using survey data on their academic and social internet use patterns five years earlier (aged 12-13), enabling us to explore the origins, attributes, and outcomes of their distinct use pathways. We found that interviewees' 'digital socialisation' involved different ways of reconciling technological developments with their ideas about the pathway to maturity and status recognition. Young people who grew up with limited internet access learned to view task-orientated use, such as schoolwork, as the only worthwhile use of this access. Academically-driven students instead valued such use as a more productive and refined choice when compared to other social and recreational practices. Those with better, less regulated access were less dismissive of these non-educational uses, and were more confident and pragmatic about online opportunities and risks as they approached early adulthood.

Our findings highlight the need to support young people in developing the capacity to manage, rather than avoid the risks of the internet.

Key words: Young people, ICTs, socialisation, online risks, digital inequality

Word count: 8,441

Introduction

In this article we explore differences in young people's 'digital socialisation': that is, the process by which young people learn to form value judgments about their use of digital media and the internet. Today's youth vary considerably in their skills, resources, and motivations when they begin using the internet (Helsper & Eynon, 2010). Many scholars contend that, by shaping young people's understandings and experiences of the benefits and risks of internet use, such differences may compound into social and economic inequalities during the transition to adulthood (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). While value orientations developed in adolescence can predict lifelong attitudes and behaviors in other areas (Alwin & Krosnick, 1991), few studies have examined how young people's values concerning internet use are formed, or the longer-term outcomes associated with their digital socialisation in adolescence.

Recently, scholars have called for greater sensitivity to the views of young people when framing the benefits and risks of their online practices (Buckingham, 2006; Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). Those adults who exert influence over this framing process, such as parents, educators, policymakers, and researchers themselves, can often misinterpret, overlook, or marginalise such views (Holmes, 2011). This is exemplified by paradoxical depictions of young people as proficient internet users (i.e. 'Digital Natives') who are, nonetheless, unable to assess the significance of their use for themselves (Facer et al., 2001). Following Livingstone and Haddon (2009), we favour a youth-centred research approach which seeks to recognise and convey the worldviews

of young people embarking on internet use. Such insights are especially valuable given a lack of longitudinal research examining the nature and outcomes of youth internet use.

We investigate young people's digital socialisation by examining their own accounts of their developing internet use between adolescence and early adulthood. We analysed data from interviews with 20 participants selected from a large cohort study of secondary school students in Queensland, Australia. Participants were selected based on survey data about the composition of their internet use five years earlier, allowing us to explore the emerging value orientations of a diverse group of internet users over time. Interviews were held in the year following school (participants aged 17/18) and focused on how participants incorporated internet use into their academic, social, and leisure practices as they were growing up.

Background

Prior research identifies three main mechanisms that influence young people's digital socialisation and values regarding internet use: (1) the design characteristics of the medium or platform they are using (Rogers, 2003); (2) norms, rules and expectations which apply to their use (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2012); and (3) their capacity to learn from previous usage experiences (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). We first examine each of these three approaches in turn.

Technology design characteristics and innovation processes

A prevalent view in the diffusion of innovations and technology acceptance literatures is that new technological innovations have attributes which influence individuals' perceptions about them (Davis, 1989; Rogers, 2003). When a new device, usage platform (e.g. Facebook, YouTube), or genre of use (e.g. social networking) emerges, potential adopters pay attention to its relative advantages over existing technologies and practices, its complexity, and its compatibility with their broader values and lifestyles.

This implies that these attributes are fixed and inherent to the innovation itself - products of its design rather than of its situational use (Feenberg, 1991) - and that most people will form similar views about the innovation over time. As they learn about the advantages and disadvantages of an innovation's design, individuals shift from a value-neutral stance and towards a decision about whether or not to adopt (Rogers, 2003).

Young people's depiction as 'Digital Natives' implies that they have traits which place them at the forefront of this innovation adoption process, such as being more cosmopolitan, tolerant of uncertainty and adaptable to change (Prensky, 2001; Rogers, 2003). Together, these contributions suggest that most young people arrive at similar, and largely positive, orientations towards new forms of internet use as these emerge.

Norms, rules, and expectations regarding use

Young people's values concerning internet use may also be influenced by regulatory discourses. Parents, teachers, and schools construe academic internet uses as legitimate, desirable, and appropriate via a range of informal means (e.g. norms and expectations) and more formal means (i.e. explicit rules). These assessments may be affirmed or contested within a user's peer group, family context, or by users themselves as they seek to legitimise social and recreational uses they find meaningful and worthwhile. Young people's perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of internet use may therefore vary in ways that reproduce social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; Hargittai & Hsieh, 2012). This involves three related processes: (1) young people internalise status-specific values about what constitutes beneficial and capital-enhancing use from influential others (e.g. parents, siblings, teachers, and peers); (2) these values are reinforced by mechanisms (e.g. norms, rules and expectations) that reward certain uses and marginalise others; and (3) this further differentiates them in their access to the

economic, social, cultural, and technological resources needed to comply with the internet uses expected of them.

Existing research finds that adolescent internet use emerges in a discourse of academic necessity that encourages narrow, task-orientated, and largely informational use (Kalmus et al., 2009). Angus et al.'s (2004) qualitative exploration of young Australians' ICT use at home and school found that such use was reinforced by close ties between parents with higher economic or cultural capital, and their children's schools. Consistent with Coleman's (1988) idea of 'intergenerational closure', these close ties ensure that parents and schools are consistent about the kinds of behaviour they expect of children, and the means for regulating such behaviour. Yet differences exist between the young people's internet access and autonomy of use at home and at school. While most schools employ rules, surveillance, and other measures to regulate internet use, parents' mediation of home use is more varied (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Some young people may therefore gravitate toward the academic uses encouraged by parents and teachers, while others may pursue the social/recreational uses that attract peer approval.

Enactive learning and experimentation

Finally, young people also learn to evaluate the benefits and costs of internet use by experimenting with different uses and experiencing their outcomes in varying contexts. The ubiquitous and multi-functional nature of internet use makes it difficult to situate value judgments in relation to any given discourse or context. Instead, users adjust their views about the 'function' of a technology based on their previous usage experiences. Livingstone & Helsper (2007) argue that broad and frequent internet users are able to draw on a wider range of experiences to more accurately determine which internet uses

work for them and which do not. These users may be better placed than most to tailor their use to their changing needs and circumstances (Livingstone & Helpser, 2007).

In her study of internet use amongst economically disadvantaged American teenagers, Robinson (2009) found that young people learned different 'strategies of action' based on the kinds of internet uses that were possible in their circumstances. Those with less access and autonomy enacted a 'taste for the necessary', where schoolwork was given priority and other activities were construed as unnecessary and wasteful. Meanwhile, those with better access and autonomy engaged in 'serious play', characterised by more open-ended browsing. Ito and colleagues (2010) undertook a range of ethnographic case studies examining how American youth incorporated media into their everyday lives. They identified three 'genres of participation' encapsulating the skills, objectives, and practices they observed: (1) Hanging out - a friendship-driven form of engagement focused on maintaining offline ties by sharing links, music, games, and social contact; (2) Messing around - a transitional phase between friendship-driven and interest-driven forms of engagement, which coincided with more intensive use, exploring different technologies and their uses, editing and producing content; and (3) Geeking out - interest-driven use which emphasised specialist expertise, frequent use of diverse media, and a willingness to challenge established rules and norms. These studies suggests that young people experiment with school- and peer-orientated activities which are low-cost and can be easily abandoned, before progressing towards more expansive and rewarding use once they have the necessary access and autonomy, and are skilled enough to mitigate the higher risks attached to these activities.

Our study examines how young people develop their value judgments about what constitutes effective and appropriate internet use. The aforementioned research suggests three types of influences on this process of digital socialisation, but much

remains unclear about how these influences operate and what broader consequences they entail for young people. For this reason, we asked our respondents about a range of influences on their internet use growing up, whilst exploring their current views about the main risks and benefits of internet use. This enabled us to reconcile contrasting explanations for why young people differ in their values concerning internet use.

Methods

The 'Our Lives' Project

The interviewees for this study were recruited from the Social Futures and Life Pathways ('Our Lives') project, which is an infinite-life cohort study of young people in Queensland, Australia. The project examines respondents' changing attitudes, values and behaviours as they move through high school and transition to adulthood. Data were first collected in 2006 when participants were beginning secondary school (Grade 8, aged 12/13, n=7,031), then again in 2008 when they were in Grade 10 (aged 14/15, n=3,653), and in 2010 when they were in Grade 12 (aged 16/17, n=3,207). The interviews used in this paper took place in 2011, the year after high school, and respondents were recruited from students who had participated in all three surveys.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE – Interview Sampling Typology

Interview Recruitment and Sampling Characteristics

Qualitative interviewing was identified as the most suitable data collection method for examining respondent's values and attitudes towards different types of internet use in the context of their academic and social lives growing up (Mason, 2002). However, interview participants were selected using information they provided about their internet use during wave 1 of the survey, when they were beginning high school. At that time, respondents were asked 'How many HOURS PER WEEK, on average, do you spend doing the following?' The two items focused on here are 'Using the Internet

to email or chat with friends' and 'Using the Internet to help with your homework'. Respondents selected from five response categories: 1 ='None'; 2 ='1-3 hours'; 3 ='4-6 hours'; 4 = '7-9 hours'; and 5 = '10 or more hours'. This enabled us to recruit respondents who had diverse internet practices at the beginning of high school and to investigate changes in their internet use over time. Using this information we developed a typology of use (shown in Figure 1): (1) 'Less Engaged' users who spent little or no time on either activity during wave 1; (2) 'Academically-Orientated' users who spent a lot of time studying online and little or no time on social use; (3) 'Socially-Orientated' users who spent much time socialising online but little or no time on academic use; and (4) 'All-Rounders' who spent much time on both activities.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE – Qualitative Sampling Characteristics

There were 281 students who participated in all three waves and whose internet usage patterns fit our recruitment typology. Five participants were randomly selected from each of the four groups. Table 1 shows that the recruitment typology and interview sample represented a broad cross-section of the wave 1 sample, containing a mix of males and females from different schools and geographic regions. This is important because, in their prior analysis of the wave 1 time use items, Smith et al. (2013) found that female students spent more time on both social and academic uses; students enrolled in the (typically wealthier) private schooling sector spent more time on academic use than public school students; and that students living in regional and remote geographic areas spent substantially less time on social use than those living in urban areas. Data on family socioeconomic status (SES) were at best approximations due to the high levels of missing or 'Don't know' responses for parental education and employment status measures. However, all categories of these variables were represented in both the recruitment typology and the interview sample.

Interview approach

Participants were sampled and contacted in small batches until the quota for each typology group was reached. They were asked by phone if they agreed to participate, and as an incentive were offered a $20 gift card. In total, 41 individuals were sampled and approached before the interview quotas were achieved. Of those who did not participate, 9 were refusals and 12 were unreachable. Interviews were held in participants' homes or at universities they attended and lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour 15 minutes. The interview design was semi-structured, enabling us to keep interviews focused, but also to allow respondents to raise topics relevant to them. We ensured that interviews covered four key topics: (1) respondents' broader work, study and leisure practices; (2) their early internet use experiences and usage priorities during high school; (3) their access levels and norms/rules regarding use during high school; and (4) their perceived benefits and risks of use (and strategies for managing these).

Analysis

In our analysis we employed an interpretivist approach to ascertain the diverse meanings internet use can be given (Silverman, 2001). While the coding and analysis of interview data was structured around the four topic areas described above, 'free nodes' were also used to record unstructured, empirically-driven themes of potential interest (Richards, 1998). The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, respondents' accounts of their internet use during school were examined for key patterns and themes. In the second stage, respondents' value judgments about the benefits and risks of different types of internet use were analysed. Lastly, the four different typology groups were compared so as to illustrate similarities and differences between them.

Results

Our results are presented in three sections examining different stages of respondents' digital socialisation. We begin with interviewees' accounts of their first experiences of going online and explore the main value orientations towards internet use which emerged during high school. Respondents constructed their use within two contrasting discourses about the pathway to adulthood and status recognition, emphasising 'academic maturity' on the one hand and 'technological maturity' on the other. In the second section, we show that this tension between school- and peer-based expectations was related to changes in respondents' internet access and autonomy of use at home as they grew older. Lastly, we examine how the contrasting value orientations they developed during school impacted on respondents' current views about the benefits and risks of internet use in their lives following school. Respondents whose digital socialisation unfolded in different ways held varying ideas about the convenience, social connectivity, and continuity of access which internet use could afford them.

Early experiences of internet use & emerging value orientations

When asked about their initial experiences of using the internet, most interviewees described first going online around the middle of primary school (e.g. Grades 4-6, aged 8-11 years). This suggests that the forces which shaped interviewees' usage had been in play for some years prior to the start of high school, when they were classified into typology groups for the purposes of this study. Some interviewees, like Adrian, recalled first using the internet for school activities, at the request of parents or teachers:

> Yes, it was in Year 3 and I needed to find out something for school so Mum thought it would be a good time to introduce me sort of thing to the internet, even though you could go make a cup of tea by the time the page had loaded, just to find out something about insects.
>
> **Adrian (Academically Orientated)**

Underscoring the role of norms valuing schoolwork, this experience led Adrian to view his use of the internet for academic reasons as consistent with his mother's expectations, which also aligned with those of his school. The other Academically Orientated users - most of whom had at least one university-educated parent, and all of whom attended private schools - reported similar experiences. For members of the Socially Oriented and All Rounder groups, early internet use was more driven by the intrinsic curiosity and leisure practices of children themselves. For instance, Michelle, who was in the Socially Orientated group, recalled playing a Barbie game where she had to go online to access downloadable content. Once online she began using a kids' search engine ('Yahooligans') to look for games and jokes.

These early experiences influenced the groups in which respondents were classified during early high school and their longer-term development as internet users during high school. Where Adrian remained narrower and more task-orientated in his use as he progressed through high school, Michelle's use expanded and diversified, reflecting the self-directed exploration with which it began. Other early experiences were more ambiguous in terms of their longer-term repercussions. Users from various groups engaged in what Hasebrink et al. (2009) calls 'edutainment' uses: activities which students perceive as fun, and which reinforce skills and dispositions that are rewarded in the academic context, such as information-seeking. Steve, who was in the Socially Orientated group, described his early use as 'Googling stuff… a little bit of assignments, but mostly just playing around'. Similarly, a Less Engaged user named John recalled browsing encyclopedias and looking up recipes. As shown later, examples such as these highlight the complex motivations underlying the early internet use of respondents in all typology groups.

As they grew older, however, changes in the interviewees' circumstances exacerbated the tension between their intrinsic and extrinsic usage motivations. This coincided with respondents' use of email, instant messaging, and social networking, to manage their emerging personal relationships. For those engaging in intrinsically motivated activities such as online gaming, increasing extrinsic pressures (e.g. social and academic expectations) often meant scaling back such use. Sarah, who was the only female interviewee who played games in high school, recalled how the need to keep up with schoolwork and social developments left little time for gaming as she progressed through high school:

> Probably going into high school I guess is when I started studying more and things like that. I probably would have been around Grade 10. I was spending a lot of time on assignments and things like that, so I guess that's when I stopped playing games probably just because I'd run out of time for it. Then it was kind of like - and then everybody got Facebook. I didn't get Facebook straight away. I didn't want it at all and then it kind of got to the point where I was like, everybody's on Facebook. So then I got that and I guess that's why I use it now, yeah.
>
> **Sarah (All Rounder)**

When this social dimension to their use emerged interviewees begin displaying the taste for innovation emblematic of the 'Digital Native': it was often noted that, to remain socially engaged, one needed to adopt new social media in a timely manner. Respondents used innovation timelines as narrative devices to situate their own maturity as internet users in relation to their peers, and to highlight obstacles preventing them from meeting key developmental milestones. For instance, Bernard recalled how his parents' restrictions impeded his timely entry into social use:

> Well, the first foray into that thing would have been MSN, which I think I only got that in Grade 8 or 9 or so. Other people had it sort of like Grade 6 or 7. I don't know. I think my parents had some stupid excuse like we didn't have a fast enough internet or something like that. I would go over to a friend's place and they were there and I always thought this is the greatest thing of all time…

Bernard (Academically Orientated)

Others situated themselves as earlier adopters on this timeline, influential in shaping the behaviour of their more underdeveloped peers. For example, Steve, who was from the Socially Orientated group, described being the first amongst his friends to download pirated movies. Through his early adoption of this practice he situated himself ahead of his peers by virtue of his expertise, which he then 'passed down the chain so now everybody has the knowledge and skill to do that sort of stuff.' For Steve, staying ahead of the innovation curve was an integral part of growing up, an achievement he attributed to his own intrinsic desire to explore and assimilate new things:

> The whole thing is, you sort of develop with the internet, you know? It was - the internet wasn't always like that. As you grow up, you assimilate new things into your - I suppose your computing experience. Like Facebook - that hasn't always been around. YouTube hasn't always been around. You haven't always been able to open a few tabs at once. So I suppose as technology has developed, I've assimilated those things into my use of it.

Steve (Socially Orientated)

Having grown up during the rise of Web 2.0, with social networking sites and peer-to-peer applications reshaping the digital landscape around them, the interviewees viewed these developments through the lens of their own transitions to adulthood. For Socially Oriented interviewees, lagging behind on the expected timeline of use signaled technological immaturity relative to one's peers, whereas technological innovation and leadership demonstrated expertise and status. This contrasted with Academically Orientated users, who co-opted internet use more selectively into their career plans as a mark of academic maturity, individual self-discipline, and refined tastes.

In their later schooling years, most respondents oscillated between discourses of technological and academic maturity, and the contrasting value orientations these

engendered. Another Socially Orientated interviewee, Rachel, described how she took up Facebook because she had 'outgrown' MSN:

> I think with Grade 11 and 12 I realised okay, I need to start focusing more on assignments and everything rather than social stuff and then I kind of realised that that's a big distraction when you've got it constantly flashing whenever someone's talking and things like that.

Rachel (Socially Orientated)

Rachel initially framed her individual development in accordance with her progression along the social use timeline of her peers. Yet as her schoolwork grew, managing this workload became a new benchmark for maturity, whilst her social obligations now became a source of distraction.

Changing access and autonomy of use during high school

The tension between these value orientations was related to respondents' levels of internet access and autonomy of use during high school. Less Engaged users were the only interviewees whose internet use was relatively free from such tension. Mostly from regional or remote Queensland, these young people had mostly grown up sharing poorer quality internet access with other family members. They were limited in the amount of time they could spend online and given little choice as to how that time was spent. Harriet was from a single-income, lower SES family and had shared a desktop PC with her mother and three younger siblings. The scarcity of online time meant she had learned to prioritise schoolwork ahead of other possible uses:

> Yeah, we had to share between - I've got three siblings. So trying to find time to, you know, fit homework in and all that was difficult. That's why I ended up getting my own laptop because I didn't want to have to wait to do assignments and everything because Mum was doing her work on there as well. So, yeah, it was mainly just a time thing.

Harriet (Less Engaged)

Brad, another Less Engaged user who grew up in a regional area with dial-up access, was also not allowed to engage in the same recreational uses as his friends:

> **Interviewer**: Back when you had a computer and you had dial up earlier on, did your parents have any sort of ground rules about how you used the internet?
>
> **Brad (Less Engaged)**: Yeah, don't download videos. I think that slowed it up even more. Don't play games.
>
> **Interviewer**: Did they want you to focus on school work?
>
> **Brad**: Yeah well they wanted that and they wanted for us to both have a fair share of it.

Although Less Engaged and Academically Orientated users displayed similar preferences for academic use, the nature of their digital socialisation differed markedly. Academically Orientated users learned to value social and recreational uses as less productive and worthwhile *relative to* academic use. Typically from wealthier families with highly educated parents, these users could rely on their parents for improvements in access. By complying with their parents' expectations, and distancing themselves from non-compliant siblings and peers, Academically Orientated users were able to earn their parents' trust and justify better access with fewer restrictions:

> **Interviewer:** Did your Mum keep an eye on you when you started using the computer in your own room?
>
> **Amy (Academically Orientated)**: No because she knew that I never used it for anything I didn't - Mum knew that I only used it for schoolwork really. She's always felt she hasn't had to keep an eye on me and my younger brother, she has always had to keep an eye on him. She hasn't wanted to put a computer in his room because she knows that she needs to keep an eye on him.

Yet even Academically-Orientated users engaged in social and recreational online activities under certain circumstances, such as when they had completed their homework. Less Engaged users, who lacked the time and resources needed for non-academic use, came to view these as unnecessary and wasteful *in general,* and not just relative to academic use. In rejecting such uses more unconditionally, these users were

doubly disadvantaged over time: they were unable to distinguish themselves in terms of their self-discipline, like Academically Orientated users, or their expertise and innovativeness, like Socially Orientated users and All Rounders.

Key milestones in a respondent's academic development, such as when they earned good grades or entered senior year, were times when their parents rewarded them with improved access (e.g. new laptops) and fewer restrictions on their use (e.g. allowing them bedroom access). Yet Socially Orientated users and All Rounders - who valued technological maturity and the needed to keep up with their peers - were less willing to accept restrictions on their access and autonomy that they felt might deprive them of new experiences or opportunities. Mike was an All Rounder from a low SES background in which neither parent was currently employed at the time of the interview. For him, the etiquette of using a shared family space hindered his online activities to the point that he bought his own laptop with income from a part-time job:

> **Interviewer**: Were there many sort of rules about what you did at home?
> **Mike (All Rounder)**: No, it was pretty much just use it. It used to be out in the living room so that - there wasn't any set rules. It was just common sense. You're not going to randomly go on a porn site or something in front of your whole family. So that's a little bit weird. Then I ended up just having my laptop and got to go to whatever I wanted.

Far from being unconditional, Mike's view about the appropriateness of watching pornography was based on an extrinsic consideration (his family being nearby) which he saw as unnecessary and avoidable (he could purchase a laptop with income from his part time job). Mike's case illustrates how some young people - specifically, those whose parents lack the education or income necessary to serve as access gatekeepers - experience a 'fast-tracked' transition to internet use autonomy.

All respondents embraced certain online activities and rejected others based on their changing access, autonomy, and motivations for use during school. Academically

Orientated users rejected activities that interfered with their increasing schoolwork, whilst Less Engaged users grew skeptical of activities which were not feasible given their limited resources. Socially Orientated users embraced activities according to the social use timelines of their peers, or when they discovered them for themselves. Meanwhile, All Rounders developed the most fluid and individualised sense of how to behave online. These users had diverse internet use which mixed academic and non-academic activities (e.g. 'edutainment') from an early age, whilst also experiencing varying degrees of parental mediation based on their family socioeconomic context. Since they understood the context-sensitive nature of peer- and school-based norms surrounding their use, they developed strategies and resources enabling them to comply with or circumvent those norms when it suited them.

Current perceptions about the benefits and costs of internet use

The respondents' academic and technological maturity affected how they viewed their internet use at the time of the interviews, one year after high school. We observed three domains in which interviewees evaluated the benefits and risks of internet use. The first of these ('easy to reach') emphasised how internet use made accessing information, goods and services more convenient. The second domain ('reaching out') focused on how their use facilitated social connectivity. The third ('always within reach') concerned the extent to which their use enabled instant gratification and extended one's presence across various domains of daily life.

Easy to reach

Internet use was perceived as convenient when it made accessing information or services easier, faster, and more affordable. This sentiment was strongest for those who had constructed their internet use within a discourse of academic maturity. However, since all but two interviewees attended university, most viewed online information-

seeking as convenient. For Rachel, who had the longest commute to and from university, online research enhanced her study routine and reduced the need for travel:

> With everything else that I have to do I can multi-task with it, so I can be going on there and researching and I can be writing down, taking all my notes, typing out my assignment, doing it all, looking back at research I have in my books, looking at other textbooks I've got without carrying it all to the library.
>
> **Rachel (Socially Orientated)**

Several interviewees highlighted the risks of unreliable information online and their strategies for avoiding this. Earlier, we noted how Adrian's mother helped frame his initial internet use within a discourse of academic maturity; as such, cross-checking sources online to ensure validity was a practice Adrian (Academically Oriented) had learned from an early age. This contrasted with the experiences of John, who was originally classified as a Less Engaged user despite being from a wealthier family than others in this group. Having engaged in "edutainment"-type uses early on, his usage profile broadened once his family decided to upgrade their home internet access. As a result, John developed a more hybridised orientation towards information-seeking - one which recognised concerns about the credibility of information on sites like Wikipedia, but which also valued getting research done quickly to free up time for other activities:

> I go to Wikipedia and then read an interesting passage and then go to their reference and then read their reference and then reference that. Wikipedia is not reference-able because no one will possibly listen to you. So I use Wikipedia's reference and that's kind of what I did again because I kind of had the technological maturity to know that, that's where they get their information from.
>
> **John (Less Engaged)**

This strategy - which John presents as his own badge of technological maturity - emphasises finding information quickly and in a way that appears legitimate to examiners, rather than the accuracy of the information itself. Far from being defined by

their early usage experiences, John's case suggests that changes in respondents' circumstances as they grew up also affected their digital socialisation.

Now that most interviewees were engaged in some form of part-time work, financial activities such as online banking and shopping were seen as potentially more convenient than traditional means of achieving these tasks. Yet while respondents generally viewed online banking sites as secure, they were more wary when it came to shopping online. Nick, who was in the Socially Orientated group, had been allowed from an early age to use the internet at home with no explicit rules about his use. However, having no other siblings to compete with for access, he had always been content with using a computer in a shared family space. Whereas John's access and autonomy had changed markedly during school, in Nick's case it had not; rather, his parents knew about his online activities, including shopping, and supported these with the purchase of anti-virus software:

> I mean dad has got a great antivirus software that he pays for every year, it pretty much blocks everything that could be a virus. In terms of identity theft, it's pretty simple these days. In the URL bar it's got a green thing on the end if it's a secure website so if you're doing any transactions - I mean to do it through that and PayPal is so easy. It's just too easy because it's always secured and pretty much every website has it or direct bank transfer.
>
> **Nick (Socially Orientated)**

Offering a modest rating of his skill level out of 10 ('probably a 6 or 7'), Nick was more confident in his ability to shop online than other Socially Orientated users who had experienced less parental involvement in their use as. Where activities like banking and research were seen as necessary tasks with fewer downsides, shopping was seen as a riskier, more discretionary activity, and one that usually involved parents' approval and financial resources. Since many broader and exploratory users resisted

parental involvement in their use, when it came to online shopping, these users lacked the confidence and experience they displayed in other areas.

Reaching out

While internet use was also perceived as fostering social connectivity, this sentiment was mostly associated with the respondents' notions of technological maturity. This was particularly evident for interviewees who had grown up with poorer access or more heavily restricted use, such as Less Engaged users from rural areas. One such user, Brad, moved to a major regional city to study engineering at university after high school. Even now that he had access to high-speed broadband, Brad was one of the few interviewees not on Facebook. Since he preferred social interaction with a clearly defined purpose, he felt that email was more conducive to this:

> Usually it's more direct. You're not talking about - you sort of get side-tracked and then you're sitting around. But when it's just an email it's just to the point. It's not talking about what happened last weekend or anything.
>
> **Brad (Less Engaged)**

On weekends Brad liked to ride motorbikes with his friends because, as he put it: 'I don't really like sitting around and socialising - I like doing something while you're socialising.' Despite his skepticism about many social internet uses, Brad found one such avenue of use (email) that met his need for activity-orientated interaction.

Academically Orientated users, who were also less sensitive to the innovation timelines of their peers, were more reluctant to adopt Facebook. After doing so, they remained skeptical about site features which encouraged active and publicly visible interaction, such as commenting on status updates or a friend's wall. This career-driven group emphasised information disclosure risks pointed out by teachers or parents:

> You've just got to always be careful that you don't write anything or don't put anything up that you wouldn't be comfortable with everyone seeing - future

employers because companies do. Mum said that she knows of someone at her work that goes through and sees people on Facebook, like goes and searches their Facebook page before they employ people.

Amy (Academically Orientated)

While not oblivious to such risks, Socially Orientated users valued sharing details about their lives online with friends and family. With varied success, they used privacy settings or self-censorship to mitigate the risks associated with sharing online.

Even though most interviewees reported only adding someone on Facebook if they already knew them, respondents had different ideas about the level of knowledge required. More reluctant and risk-averse users, such as Amy, employed a strict criteria based on prior physical contact with the person. Other more active users were flexible about such criteria when opportunities presented themselves. For Mike, the prospect of finding a girlfriend overrode the risks of adding people he had not met:

> I'll go and look at their photos, if they look familiar, if they're from a neighbouring school or something. If it's some random from Victoria I'll probably just decline. Then, at a point, it sounds quite shallow - say, if it's a good-looking girl I'll probably just accept.

Mike (All Rounder)

Having transitioned years earlier to exclusive internet access with little parental regulation of his use, Mike was less risk-averse or self-critical of his online behavior. Carol was an All Rounder who grew up with similarly high levels of access and autonomy. However, she also remained sensitive to her mother's oft-expressed concerns about the risks posed by online predators ('I know that she's very, very wary about that'.) She articulated a more nuanced strategy for verifying online identity:

> If you're adding a friend of a friend or something like that, you can usually check dodgyness. Like there's lots of measures you can take to check dodgyness, like looking at the page, seeing how many friends they have. If it's a tiny number of friends, then you're like, oh, this is probably a fake person. Or if they've got like

one dodgy photo of themselves, that's like oh this is probably a fake person. So
you can look at things like that.

Carol (All Rounder)

In checking 'dodgyness', Carol used strategies, such as cross-verifying sources, similar to those which users like Adrian had employed in an academic context. Here the discourses of academic and technological maturity converged in different ways based on gender: Carol, more so than Mike, weighed the expectations of parents alongside those of her peers when it came to socialising online, and this taught her to more critically examine identity cues in ambiguous online contexts.

Always within reach

The more they used the internet, the more respondents felt continuously within reach of the places, people, information, and other resources they accessed online. This was especially true for All-Rounders and those whose use was influenced by both discourses of academic and technological maturity. Several of these interviewees described avidly following news developments online. Jennifer, who had been the earliest amongst her friends to adopt Facebook, now prided herself on having been the first on Facebook to share news about the death of Osama Bin Laden:

Like I remember hearing about Osama Bin Laden, that was before actually like the
President announced it. Because someone had like posted it like on Twitter and
then it was posted on Tumblr. Like I was the first person on Facebook to have a
post about it, it was like two hours till someone else posted something.

Jennifer (All Rounder)

Jennifer leveraged her informational and social connectedness to position herself as a gatekeeper and an expert within her social network. This act of sharing enabled Jennifer to display her academic and technological maturity to her peers, thereby enhancing her status in different ways.

Yet to stay accessible to others and to guarantee that vital information did not pass them by, respondents needed to constantly, actively monitor the internet. This practice of 'just checking' meant that interviewees were frequently presented with opportunities to gratify various social, informational, and recreational needs. The extent to which they acted on, or resisted these opportunities, depended on how they learned to reconcile their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for use. Having internalised the view of non-academic uses as sources of distraction, Academically Orientated users like Rob found it easy to detach themselves briefly from any perceived social obligations:

> **Rob (Academically Orientated)**: When I want to research something, I'll try not
> to - if I do log on to Facebook, I log out, because sometimes, I'll just study and
> open up a new tab and go to Facebook if I'm already logged in, but when I need to
> log in and I have to sign in, then I lose all impetus.
> **Interviewer**: So not having in to sign in every time?
> **Rob**: It's like a little block in my head saying, oh not again.

Users who conducted a wider range of everyday activities online were more concerned about the entangled and unavoidable nature of their online commitments. Illustrating this point, all four respondents who described internet use as 'addictive' were All Rounders. One of these users, Carol, was sensitive to various 'little things that can get me sucked into my internet usage'. Unlike Rob, who relied on self-discipline (a 'little block in my head') to stop him from procrastinating, Carol supplemented this with extrinsic measures - such as warning friends not to contact her while she studied.

Multitasking was another strategy respondents used to stay 'always within reach'. For Socially Orientated users, like Steve, combining online activities indiscriminately was a sign of technological maturity for his generation ('People multi-task when they learn… That's just how this generation works'). Academically Orientated users like Amy were more selective in their multitasking, taking into account the productivity benefits and cognitive costs of different activities, both offline and

online. Amy combined recreational uses, such as watching TV online, with less cognitively intensive academic tasks, such as preparing flash cards, in order to use her leisure time more efficiently. Carol was also selective about the types of activities she combined, but saw more room for integrating internet use into daily life:

> Generally the other tasks I'm doing aren't taking up too much of my brainpower, like cooking and things. So when I'm cooking, I'm usually just thinking about what's happening online anyway. If I'm getting dressed in the morning, I go into my bathroom to brush my teeth; I can kind of gauge the amount of time. Say I'm emailing someone, I can gauge the amount of time. Well, they should have replied by now and I'll go back into my room and check.
>
> **Carol (All Rounder)**

While she kept her study time uncontaminated by social and recreational activities, Carol's awareness of the social, cognitive, and temporal costs of these diverse activities enabled her to weave 'checking' practices into other domestic routines.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our goal in this paper was to explore how values about internet use form between adolescence and adulthood - a process we refer to as 'digital socialisation'. By conceptualising digital learning in this way, we joined other scholars in rejecting generalisations about young people's online choices as mostly spontaneous, risky, sophisticated, or homogenous in nature (Holmes, 2011). Our youth-centred approach assumes that young people can provide useful insights into how and why they came to make different judgements about the benefits and risks of their use (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). Based on previous research, we anticipated that innovation characteristics, norms, rules and expectations about use, and prior usage experiences would feature in respondents' accounts of their emerging usage priorities.

Respondents constructed their experiences of internet use within two discourses about the pathway to maturity and status recognition. Similar to Robinson's (2009)

'strategies of action' and Ito et al.'s (2010) 'genres of participation', these discourses situated young people's values towards internet use in relation to specific usage innovations, everyday contexts of use, and broader socialisation processes. The discourse of academic maturity emphasised internet use that was consistent with norms encouraging scholastic excellence and respondents' career aspirations, which warranted parental trust, better access and expanded autonomy. The discourse of technological maturity challenged this rationale for allocating resources, status, and autonomy. It emphasised experimentation with non-academic uses, consistent with peer norms which rewarded digital expertise and innovativeness ahead of self-discipline and risk-aversion.

As per Coleman's (1988) idea of intergenerational closure, parents, teachers, and schools were often in unison about when and why young people should go online (Kalmus et al., 2009). Parents mediated the value formation of their children in a way seldom acknowledged by diffusion and technology acceptance theorists (Davis, 1989; Rogers, 2003), or in portrayals of young people as pioneering early adopters (Prensky, 2001). Through implicit norms and expectations, and explicit rules, parents encouraged narrow, task-orientated internet use that respondents came to associate with academic maturity. This parental influence was clearest during primary school and it was Academically Orientated users (who had well-educated parents and attended private schools) who internalised it more than most: these users learned to differentiate themselves from their siblings and peers by displaying self-discipline and favoring uses that adults considered productive and capital-enhancing (Hargittai & Hseih, 2012).

Yet there were also interviewees who first went online for their own amusement or curiosity, via computer games or 'edutainment' uses fusing information-seeking with recreation. Having developed more personal, intrinsically-motivated use, these Socially Engaged and All Rounder users came closest to the archetype of the 'Digital Native':

they were more open to new usage innovations and more inclined to make up their own minds about them. These users were influential in shaping peer norms concerning the timely adoption of new forms of internet use, and the more socially engaged amongst them derived status amongst their peers by virtue of their knowledge and expertise. For others, this personal type of engagement emerged later in response to extrinsic pressure to interact with their peers online, or when they gained the access or autonomy needed to do so. Those who began this broad and exploratory use earlier thus had more experience with which to evaluate and optimise the benefits and risks of diverse types of use (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

Less Engaged users from regional Australia encountered access barriers which have previously been attributed to poor service availability, excessive cost, and lack of user confidence (Dane et al., 2013). One consequence of such barriers was that these young people lacked the access and autonomy with which to develop and demonstrate their academic self-discipline or technological expertise. Similar to Robinson's (2009) 'taste for the necessary', these respondents learned to dismiss social and recreational activities as a wasteful and unnecessary use of their limited resources. This skepticism, which persisted even after their access had improved, contrasted with All Rounders' more fluid and individualistic orientation. This group was sensitive to the normative requirements of academic and technological maturity - for self-restraint, on the one hand, and exploration, on the other - and the contexts in which these applied. They worried less about their parents', teachers', and peers' notions of proper internet use, instead forming their own views based on past experimentation. These users noted the costs, in terms of distraction, addiction, and privacy, accompanying this taste for the unexpected, or what Robinson (2009) might term 'serious play'. Young people who appropriate access and autonomy quickly and independently of their parents may do so

without learning to identify and manage such risks effectively. This is especially possible for lower SES families in which parents lack the expertise or resources needed to position themselves as access gatekeepers. Yet such findings do not imply that youth agency online is inherently problematic or risky. Rather, they highlight the need to support young people in developing the capacity to manage, rather than avoid, risks which are becoming an inherent part of their economic, social, and cultural participation in early adulthood.

Acknowledgements

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