

“Why aren’t you on Facebook?”: Patterns and experiences of using the Internet by adolescents with physical disabilities

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Background

- Children with cerebral palsy have fewer friendships, are more socially isolated, and are at *increased risk* of social impairment

(Parkes et al., 2008; Nadeau et al., 2006)

- Reduced social networks in children/adolescents with disabilities

(McGregor, 2007, Raghavendra et al., 2009)

Use of Web 2.0 & 3D Virtual Reality

- Explosive growth in the use of the Internet as a learning & social networking tool
- “Digital native” generation or “Net Generation”
- Digital Divide?

Aim

To determine the current use of the Internet, benefits and challenges, facilitators and barriers to use by children with varying levels of physical disabilities

Method

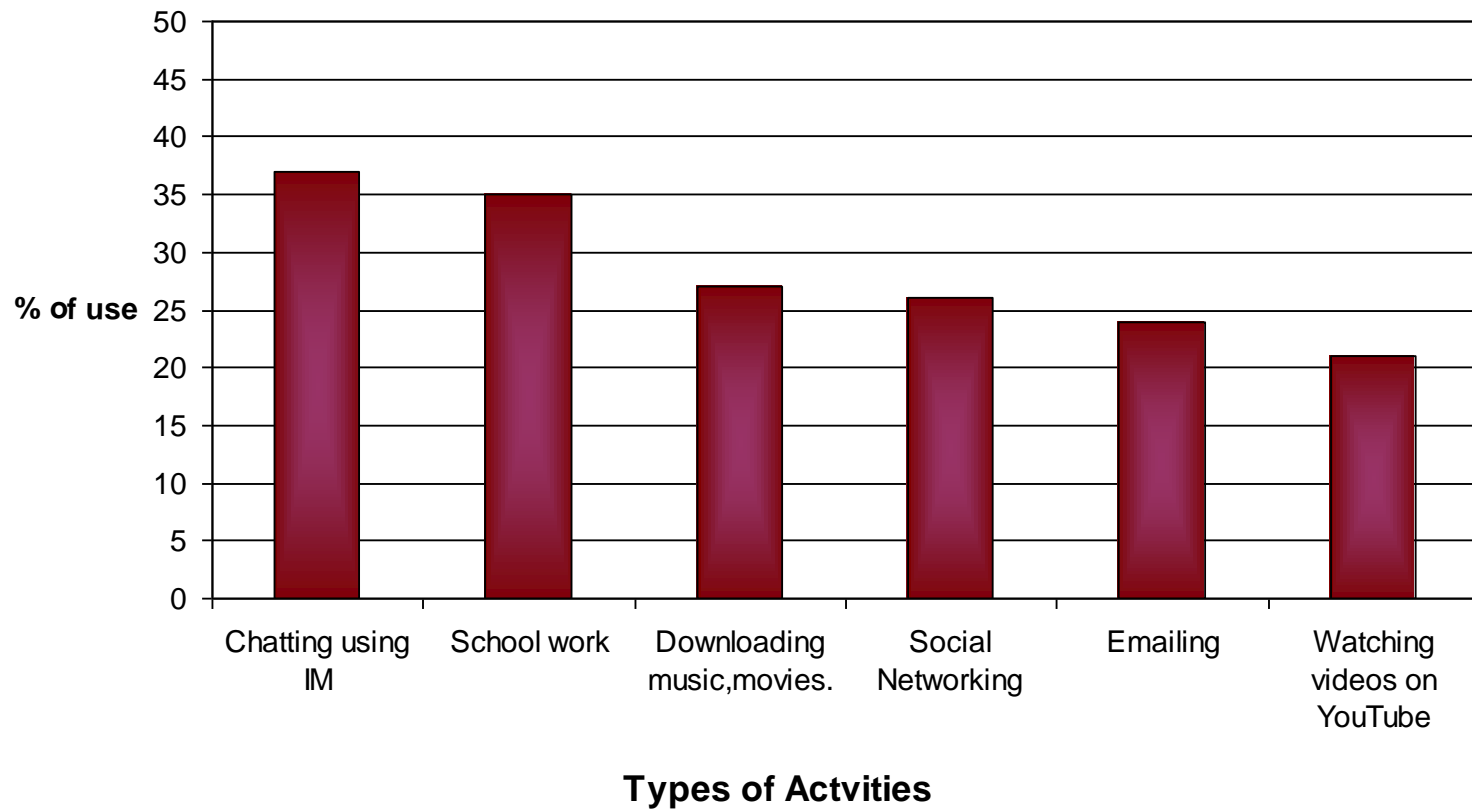
- 1) **Conduct a survey of clients of Novita with physical disabilities, between 10-17 years of age**
 - CP, Muscular dystrophy, syndromes
 - Consented to be contacted for research

- 2) **Conduct in-depth interviews with a subset of this sample, 15 children/adolescents with physical disabilities**

Results

- 303 surveys sent
- 63 usable surveys returned (20.7%)
 - Mean age = 13.9 years (SD=2.56)
 - Sex = 59% boys; 41% girls
 - Residence = 79% metro; 21% rural
 - Diagnosis: CP = 54%; MD = 11%
- 61 (97%) use the Internet;
- 87% home access; 81% school access

Frequently used Internet Activities



Social Connections

- IM networks are predominantly with friends from school (35%) or from other networks (32%).
- SN links are with friends from school (27%), family members (19%) or friends from outside school (14%).
- Emails are exchanged with friends from school (38%); family members (29%) or friends from outside school (21%).

Top 5 reasons for using the Internet

- It is fun
- Easy to get information/find out about things
- Easier for school work
- Time killer
- Interesting information

Barriers to using the Internet

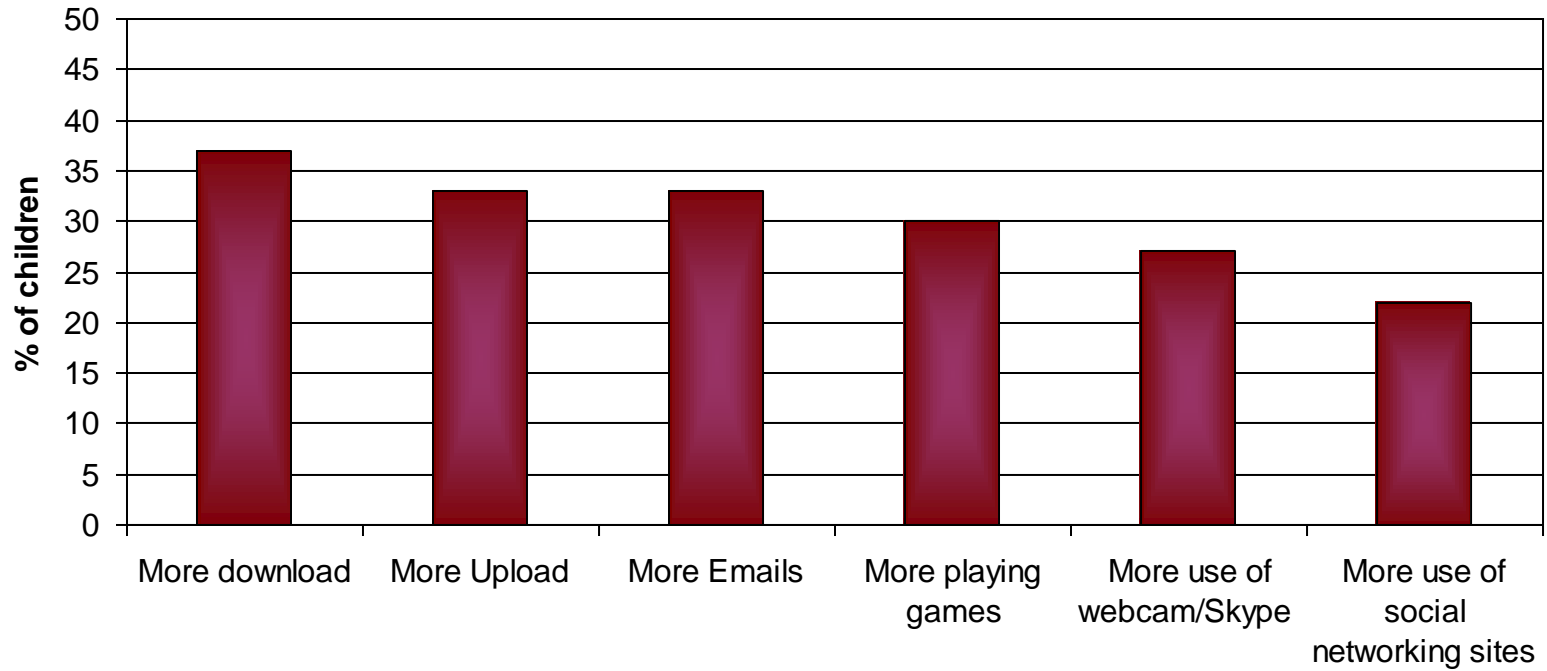
The most common barriers were:

- My parents only let me use it for a short time (22%)
- The Internet costs too much and is too slow (19%)
- Have to share the Internet (19%)
- Might end up in adult sites (13%)

Barriers that might be disability related

- Not being quick enough to play games (14%)
- Do not understand what I read (13%)
- Have difficulty using the keyboard (11%)

Would like to use more of..



Interviews

- Boys = 9; Girls = 6
- Age = 14;9 yrs

- Exploring pattern of use from survey
- Family and school supports & rules
- Self-efficacy

Key issues

Who Do I Connect with?

Strengthening & continuation of offline relationships with online

Ease of access to peers/friends

“just mainly my friends from school and stuff because we exchange emails and it’s good because when I have my plasters on and can’t go to school I can talk to them through instant messaging”

Family Rules

So we go through and check every now and again to work out who she knows, where she knows people from because it might be someone’s cousin or someone she met once at something that we don’t know at all. (mother of a participant)

Key issues

Facilitators and barriers:

- Family & School Support and rules
- Financial & technical resources
- Internet literacy of family members
- Self efficacy

Because I know how to use it.....Because I've got skill

- Attitudes to risk factors- Bullying

Tell - depends where you were. If you were at home you'd tell your parents but if you're at school tell the teachers

Summary

- A small group of adolescents with physical disabilities are using the Internet
- Predominant use is instant messaging and not so much of social networking sites
- Social Networking with known people
- Barriers are not all disability related
- Key factors: Family resources and support

Where to from here?

- New Channel 7 Children's Research Foundation funded project

Connective solutions: Facilitating the social participation of children and adolescents with physical disabilities or acquired brain injury using the Web 2.0 social networking and 3D virtual environments

Plans for a National Project- broadening to include children with other disabilities