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Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/ Polimetrix
Coming of Age in America
Part IV – The MySpace Generation

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Coming of Age in America, Part IV

The MySpace Generation

Executive Summary

This report is the fourth installment in our continuing investigation into the lives of America's next generation of adults: Generation Y. In this study, we explore the role of the Internet in the lives of Gen Yers; how it influences the way they connect with the world around them, what they perceive to be the benefits and risks of the online world, and what, if anything, they are doing to protect themselves from the potential dangers it can present.

Generation Y is the first generation to grow up with the Internet. Many have been online since their elementary school days and are at ease with the Web, viewing the Internet not only as their go-to source for information but also as a core component of their social lives. With the rise of online communities such as MySpace and Facebook, and with search engines like Google, young people know how easy it is to learn all about another person by simply typing in their name. So at a time when the Internet plays such a key role in the virtual and real lives of young adults, how safe they are in the seemingly limitless World Wide Web?

Key Findings

- Young adults may think they are careful online, and they say they value privacy, but the numbers tell a less definite story. While many voice concern about privacy and Internet safety, these concerns are weighed with the ease and convenience the Internet provides and Gen Yers readily post personal information about themselves online (some true, some not so true).
- As worried as parents may be about the dangers of online predators, Gen Y is not losing much sleep over it. Young adults are much more likely to worry about identity theft or receiving spam than they are about stalking and harassment - even among those who have already experienced it.

- There are some limits to what Gen Yers will divulge about their lives online, but for the most part they are not particularly concerned with the consequences of having a parent or an employer find out what they've shared about themselves on the Internet.
- Gen Y embraces Internet-based forms of communication. These young people consider the Internet an integral part of their lives. They use it to keep in touch with friends and family, to learn about the world around them, and even to express themselves creatively. For them, email and Instant Messaging are nearly on par with phone communication.

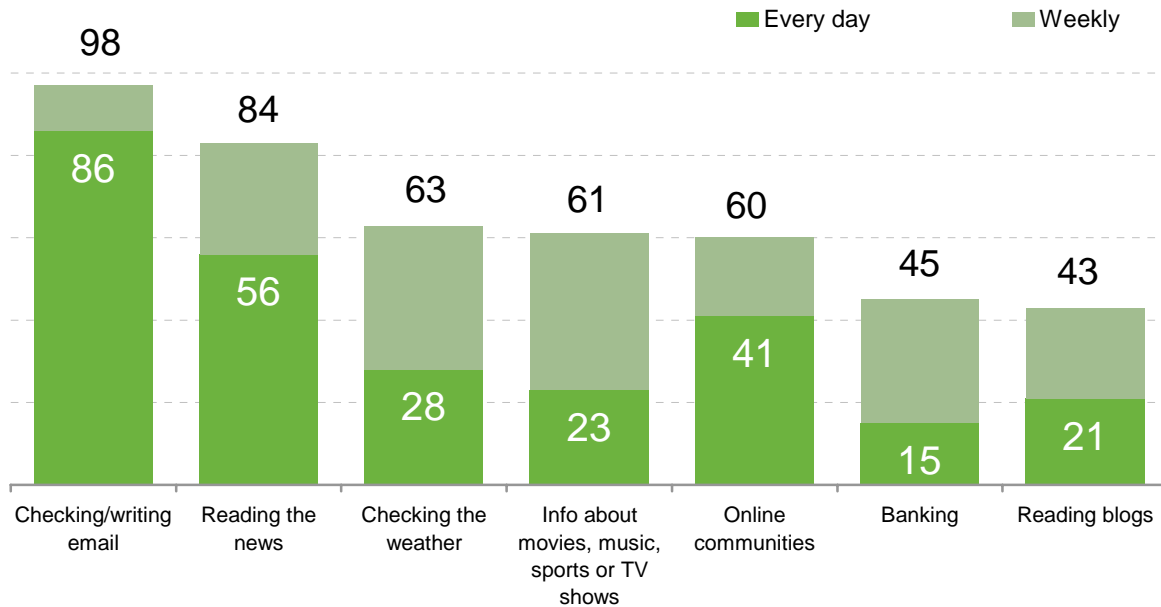
The First Internet Generation

The Internet plays a significant role in the lives of many young adults, not surprising since the advent of the Information Age occurred when most were in elementary school. Even at their young age, most Gen Yers are Internet veterans. The average age when Gen Yers first went online is 12.3 years, and nearly a quarter (24 percent) say they first began using the Internet when they were 10 years old or younger. Gen Yers have been online for an average 8.7 years.

A quarter (24 percent) of Gen Yers first started using the Internet when they were 10 years old or younger.

The Internet is a fully integrated part of young adults' daily lives. Nearly all young adults use email every day (86 percent). These young people report spending a considerable amount of time online each week, an average of 21.3 hours including time spent on email and Instant Messaging. Many use the Internet to stay in touch with friends and family, to learn about the world around them, and even to complete basic activities or errands. More than half read the news online (56 percent) and 84 percent say they do so on a weekly basis. Many young people turn to the Internet for simple tasks such as checking the weather (63 percent weekly) or banking (45 percent weekly).

■ Figure 1: How Gen Y Uses the Internet



"How often do you use the Internet for..."

With so many young adults spending so much time on the Internet, and from such a young age, it is not surprising that many young adults are extremely comfortable with online forms of communication as well. While most still prefer face to face conversation, there are few distinguishable differences between the next three preferred forms of communication. Young adults rank face to face interaction as their favorite form of communication (mean ranking 1.5 on a scale of 1 to 6), while phone conversations, email, and Instant Messaging, are lumped together in second, third, and fourth place, respectively.

■ Table 1: Most Preferred Form of Communication

Favorite Forms of Communication

| Form of Communication | Mean |
|---------------------------|------|
| Face to face conversation | 1.5 |
| Talking over the phone | 2.9 |
| Email | 3.1 |
| Instant Messaging | 3.3 |
| Letters | 4.7 |
| Blogging | 5.2 |

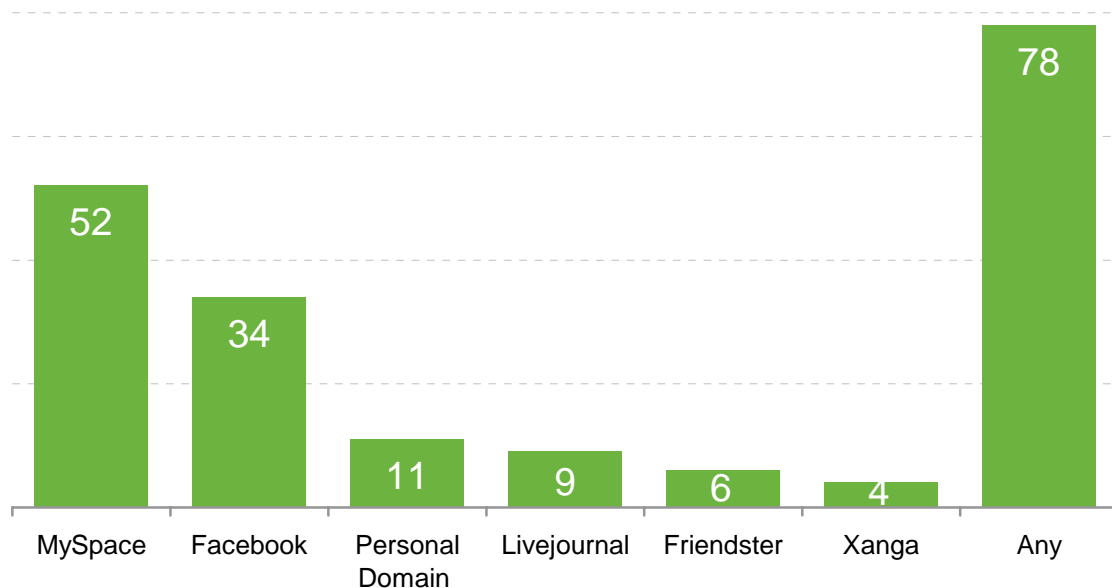
“I Don’t Know How I Would Keep Up With My Friends or Family if I Didn’t Have the Internet”

For many young people, the Internet represents not just an information superhighway but, indeed, a social highway. In fact, nearly two thirds (64 percent) agree that “I don’t know how I would keep up with my friends or family if I didn’t have the Internet.”

Three out of every four 18-24 year olds (78 percent) has a personal website, webpage, or blog.

Most young people (78 percent) have a personal website, webpage or blog, and they regularly participate in online communities such as MySpace or Facebook (60 percent weekly, 41 percent daily). Half (52 percent) of 18-24 year olds report they have a page on MySpace. A third report membership on Facebook, though that number rises to over half (54 percent) among students. Facebook’s use of .edu email addresses for targeting college and high school students attests to its popularity among students.

■ **Figure 2: Online Communities**



“Do you have a personal website, page or blog at any of the following places?”

Online communities perform a dual purpose – they connect young people to their friends, but they can also be a source of new friendships. Thirty seven percent of young adults say they have met someone online and subsequently met them in person.

Free Wheeling and Nearly Fancy Free

It is widely said that information on the Internet needs to be taken with a grain of salt. In some ways, young adults' social lives are products of the anonymous medium itself, as many lace information about themselves with half-truths and untruths in the online world. One third admit they themselves have lied or stretched the truth about themselves online, and 26 percent say they have pretended to be another person entirely.

One third of Gen Yers have lied or stretched the truth about themselves online, and 26 percent have pretended to be another person entirely.

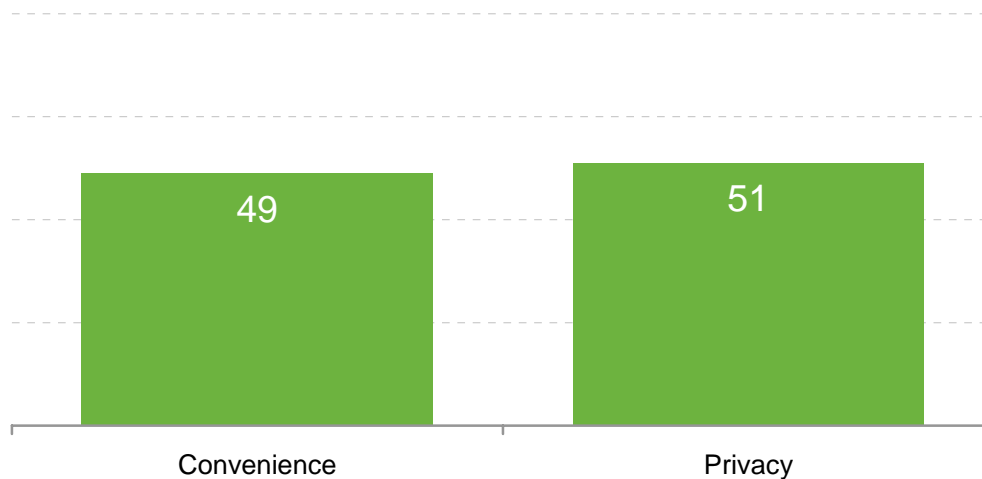
Despite how easy it is to misrepresent or lie about oneself online, most young people are not really concerned with the consequences. There is a disconnect between how they perceive their behavior online (safety first) and how they actually behave (carefree). Most are not worried about their parents finding out something about them (83 percent) or about the impact it could have on landing a job (83 percent) or getting into college (91 percent). Those who have lied about themselves online, who presumably would be at greater risk for these adverse outcomes, do not voice greater concern over the consequences than those who say they have not lied about themselves. The only concerns that do emerge among young people are receiving tons of spam (58 percent), and more seriously, being the victim of identity theft (58 percent).

While harassment and online predators are major concerns for parents and they generate a lot of ink in the press, relatively few young adults are worrying about them. Less than a third (30 percent) worry about getting harassed or stalked online. Even among those who have been harassed, few are concerned about future harassment or stalking. One fifth report having been harassed online. They are more likely to be younger (24 percent of those ages 18-21), female (23 percent), and spend a lot of time online (27 percent of those who spend 30 hours or more online). Nevertheless, even among young people who have experienced harassment, only 39 percent still worry about getting harassed in the future.

They Divulge A Lot About Themselves

On balance, young people agree "the benefits of the Internet far outweigh the dangers it presents" (87 percent agree, 52 percent strongly agree). However, they do concede a concern for privacy and safety. Just as many young people put a premium on privacy (51 percent) as they do on convenience (49 percent). Also at play in this value, however, is how young adults' use the Internet. Those who participate in online communities such as MySpace or Facebook are apt to value convenience (53 percent). On the other hand, two thirds of young adults who do not belong to online communities report they place a higher value on privacy.

■ **Figure 3: Valuing Convenience or Privacy**

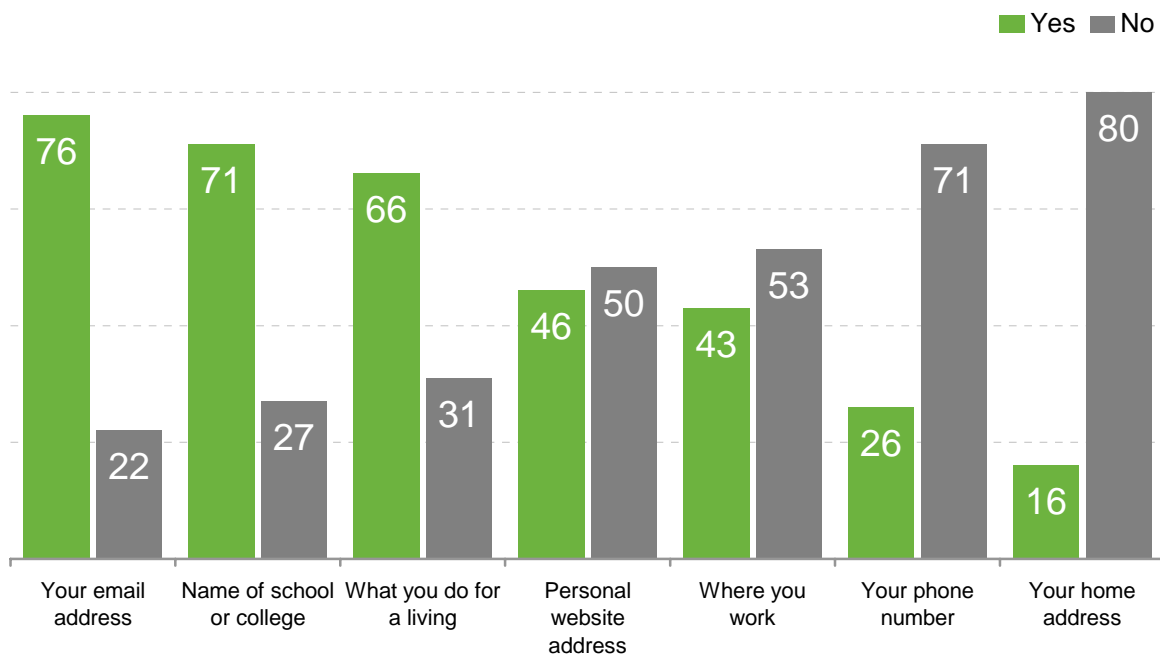


“When it comes to the Internet, do you place a higher value on convenience or on privacy?”

Most young adults worry about the influx of readily available personal information online, and they claim to exercise caution in their online lives. A majority agree that “it bothers me that anyone can easily get information about me on the Internet” (69 percent agree, 34 percent strongly agree). Many say they are “very careful” about what they say about themselves online (84 percent agree, 45 percent strongly agree). At first glance, it appears Gen Y takes the responsibilities of safe behavior on the Internet along with the freedom and convenience it affords.

The information that many do in fact give out, however, reflects this ambiguity. Young people want to talk about their lives online. They divulge a great deal of personal information freely, yet most also want to preserve some small elements of privacy for themselves. Three quarters of young adults have posted their email address online, 71 percent have posted the name of their school or college, and two thirds what they do for a living. Relatively few have posted information like their phone numbers (26 percent) or their home address (16 percent).

■ **Figure 4: Posting of Personal Information**



"Have you ever posted any of the following things about yourself online?"

However, young people don't just like to talk about their lives online, they also like to show them. Seventy eight percent have posted photos online, the most popular types being funny pictures of oneself (54 percent) as well as vacation photos (50 percent). For those involved in MySpace or Facebook, of course, the number posting photos online jumps to nearly all (both 95 percent), since photographs are a basic item in one's online profile. The youth culture of these sites is also reflected in the types of photographs posted. Photos of young adults partying are very popular (64 percent among Facebook users and 53 percent among MySpace users). A quarter of MySpace users say they have posted "sexy" photos of themselves.

Appendix A: Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and Polimetrix designed and administered this internet survey of 1,021 adults, ages 18 to 24 years old. The survey was conducted April 25-May 1, 2006. During the seven-day fielding period a total of three contacts were made with respondents, with an in-panel response rate of 8 percent.

Respondents were selected using a web panel, created by Polimetrix. The sample is nationally representative, and created by a matching technique that matches Polimetrix panelists to the demographic characteristics among randomly selected records of 18-24 year olds in the 2004 American Community Survey. The data were weighted by gender, age, student status, and race to ensure an accurate reflection of the population. The sample size with these weights applied is 1,021.

In interpreting survey results, all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error; that is, the results of a survey may differ from those which would be obtained if the entire population were interviewed. Internet surveys use, by necessity, non-probability based sampling methods and these results need to be considered with that limitation in mind.

Appendix B: Author Biographies



Anna Greenberg

Anna Greenberg is Vice President of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner. Greenberg has been called “one of the smartest of the younger Democratic consultants” and is a leading polling expert. She advises campaigns, advocacy organizations and foundations in the United States.



Jennifer Berkold

Jennifer Berkold is a Senior Associate with Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, advising non-profits, foundations, and campaigns on public attitudes on a variety of political and sociological issues. In addition to quantitative and qualitative research, she has been heavily involved with SmarTargeting at Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, which targets groups by a combination of survey research and database modeling.



Lucy Hebert

Assistant Analyst Lucy Hebert joined Greenberg Quinlan Rosner in 2004. She works on a range of projects including research on women’s health, youth, religious trends, and the changing structure of the American family.