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**Gaming as a Family**

Five times as many kids 10 and under play games with their family. Twice as many play with their family as not between 11 and 12. The percentages start to even out at 13, by 9th grade the percentages shift and by the time they get to 16, twice as many don’t play as a family as do.

Nintendo controls the family gaming market, with 1-1/2 times as many students reporting that they played Wii or DS as a family. (We are seeing this as the new spectator sport. One person plays and the rest watch them play.) Sony’s Playstation 2 was the next most popular family gaming device (the Playstation 3 barely ranked), and their PSP was slightly more popular among family gamers than the others. Xbox and Xbox 360 combined rank higher with the solo players than either Nintendo or Sony devices by a 3:2 ratio. Slightly more played computer-based games with their family than not and Nintendo’s Game Cube was used as often as a family as a solo game device.

How much time they spent gaming: Family gamers were far more likely (3:2) to play for under an hour a week, while their counterparts were far more likely (3:2) to play between 1 – 3 hours a week. This ratio flipped for 3 -5 hours a week play, with family gamers leading solo players at a 3:2 ratio. Thereafter the percentages evened out. Out of all demographic groups, the family gamers who played under 1 hour a week were the most common and outdistanced the next closest group (solo gamers who played between 1-2 hours a day) by 1/3.

Those who played as a family were 7 times more likely to play with their family and friends combined than solo gamers (45% vs. 7%).

Which games do they play?: The family and solo players play essentially the same games in the same percentages – anything in the Guitar Hero series (three times as many as its nearest competitor), Wii Sports, Halo, Gears of War, Mario and Call of Duty. Twice as many played online games as on a device when they played solo.

25% more of the family gamers preferred to play with their real life friends in strategic teams, as the solo players did, although they both preferred playing with their real friends as a team over any other type of play (for a combined 45% of the pool). And three times as many of the solo players preferred playing with new people they met online as did their family gamer counterparts.

The solo gamers are more likely to use the Internet capability of a handheld game than their family gamer counterparts (3:2).

The three most popular gaming devices for playing with their parents, the students report, are Wii (82%), Playstation (34%) and Xbox (19%).

Switching devices over time:

Slightly more family gamers stuck with the same device over time as solo gamers. Game Cubers moved to Wii, and many moved to Xbox as they became older and new games were released.

What do their parents know about their interactive gaming? Those that played as a family reported 25% more frequently that their parents knew they were playing interactive games. While almost twice as many of the solo gamers reported that their parents knew they played these games, but didn’t know they were interactive. The solo gamers were slightly more likely to hide the fact that their games were interactive from their parents (4% intentionally hid that fact and 22% didn’t offer and their parents did not ask).

The parents of the students who played as a family were far more likely to know that their children are playing with strangers and that they have interactive capabilities in the game. Three times as many family gamers’ parents use parental controls for games and twice as many supervise their children’s game play.

Who in the family is gaming? Fathers of family gamers are 8 times more likely to play with their children 88% to 12%), while moms are 6 times more likely to play with their children (54% to 7%) than in a solo gaming family. Sisters as a gaming buddy held a slight margin in family gamers over solo gamers (4:3 and 58% of family gamers). More brothers played with solo games (60% vs. 51%). Significantly more cousins played games with family gamers as with solo gamers (61% vs. 38%) and babysitters were reported 2-1/2 times more as someone a family gamer plays with. In order of prevalence, fathers were the most common family game buddy (88%), with cousins (61%), sisters (58%), mothers (54%) and brothers (51%) following in that order. Wii Sports was the favorite game cited by family gamers to play with family members.

What about safety? Family gamers were half as likely to be reported for terms of service violations as their solo counterparts and were slightly less likely to encounter someone creepy while playing the game. Three times as many family gamers said that they didn’t know you could report someone for violating the terms of service in a game.

Other than their concerns about finding ways to avoid game hackers, the family gaming group wanted more privacy settings (64.4% vs. 51.6%), ways to block creepy people (75.6% vs. 69.5%), better ways to report game bullying and trolling (54.4% vs. 47.4%), ways to protect your points/loot from being stolen (52.2% vs. 44.2%), ways to protect your ID online (71.1% vs. 60.0%), places where only teens can game, no adults allowed! (40.0% vs. 32.6%) and filters so no swearing is allowed (38.9% vs. 27.4%). Several games in both categories want live moderators in gaming chat rooms. (Of the solo gamers, most were very confident that Xbox had all these safety features already built-in.)

Younger players: Webkinz was used almost 5 times as frequently by students ten and younger than any other games. Runescape was named half as often as Webkinz in this age group (28% vs. 58%), and twice as often as Club Penguin, Lego, and Neopets (which tied at 15% of these users). They were as likely to play with their fathers, brothers and their sisters at this age (all at 83%). Moms played with them 50% of the time. They preferred Wii and computer games over other technologies (both at 72%) and DS fell next in line at 57% of the 10 and under gamers. When they name their favorite games, Lego Star Wars and Wii sports/fit were named most frequently. They never felt unsafe, but 20% reported being creeped out by someone while playing.

Preventing game hacking was tied with ID theft concerns and people stealing their game loot as the most important safety issues for them. When asked if some games were safer than others, they responded 2:1 that Webkinz was safer, with Mario Cart being named second. They reported that girls and boys both play games, but girls play less violent ones.

As the kids get a bit older, they play more computer-based games (95%) versus the next closest competitors (85% using Wii and 60% using DS). 60% reported playing both game devices and computer-based games at this age. Guitar Hero (anything in that series) expands to 65% and Webkinz drops back to 30%. Lego, Club Penguin and Runescape were not named by any users in this age-group, but Halo beat out Neopets and Grand Theft Auto (series) 15% to10% of this user age category. 95% reported that their parents knew they played interactive games, but at the same time 30% said they didn’t offer and their parents didn’t ask. They said they started playing interactive games when they were in 3rd – 5th grade (70%) but 25% said they started earlier in K-2nd grade.

It’s all about game strategy at this age. They want to play strategically with real life friends (35%) and learning new game strategies form people they meet in the game (25%). 18% reported using the Internet features of their handheld at this age, but 17% of their parents didn’t know that.

26% said their parents used parental controls for their gaming, but an equal number said they didn’t know there were such things. 60% are gaming with their families and of those 83% said they used a Wii and 42% used computer gaming or a Game Cube. Fathers were reported by 79% of the family gamers as playing with them, with brothers and cousins at 57%, moms at 43% and sisters at 36%. Babysitters were reported as “family members” gaming in 7% of the cases.

Guitar Hero (anything in the series) and “boring Wii games” were the most commonly named favorite family games in this age group.

25% had reported someone for game terms of service violations, 17% said they didn’t know you could do that and 8% had been reported. 83% wanted better ways to block creepy people and game hacking. 75% wanted to protect themselves better from ID theft.

When it comes to gender, the 11 year olds pointed out that they used to play Club Penguin together but were now moving to different games (“boys on Runescape vs. girls on Neopets”) and “more violent games for boys and more fun games for girls.”

Across all teens:

Thirteen years old polled accounted for a higher percentage of most of the gaming devices measured, with 52% of that age-group using a DS, 60% using a Playstation 2, 58% using a Xbox 360 and a whopping 92% playing online games. In this same group, 56% play games for between 2 – 5 hours a week. When asked to give us their favorite games, Halo was named by 37% of them as their favorite, Webkinz was named by 16% of them along with Call of Duty and Club Penguin coming in at the same percentage as write ins. The highest of all age groups that play just with their real life friends is the 13-year-olds, coming in at 84% vs. 67 – 71% of the other age groups.

Across all age groups between 30 (12 year olds) and 41% (16 year olds) parents were in the dark about their playing games with strangers. And while only a third of the 12 year olds knew that parental controls existed, that statistic improved with age, as more and more knew about parental controls.

Roughly 40% of the 14 and 15 year old teens were creeped out (or said others were weird, when they weren’t sure what “creeped out” meant), only slightly more than the 27% of 13 year olds who reported the same thing. The most suggestions for improving game safety and security came from both ends of the teen polls, the 12 year olds and the sixteen year olds, with the 13-15 year olds being less concerned. And 14 year olds define the divergence of girls vs. boys gaming, with 93% reporting that they play different games, as opposed to roughly 70% of the younger teens and 47% of the older ones.