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CYSE 201S
11/6/2022

“A Reverse Digital Divide: Comparing Information Security Behaviors of Generation Y and Generation Z Adults” Review

“Comparing Information Security Behaviors of Generation Y and Generation Z Adults”
Written by Scott M. Debb, Daniel R. Schaffer and Darlene G. Colson in summary was published with intent to see how different generations of people conduct themselves over the internet; to see if being part of a certain generation makes them more likely to conduct safe online practices. In this study it was tested to see if age and online experience were a major factor in which generation would be more likely to conduct cybersecurity best-practices. Data was then extracted from sample sizes taken from two public universities of varying age groups to show us quantitative results on the issue.

Younger generations are known for their technical prowess, this is shown from their ability to navigate the internet and find social networks to talk and interact with over the web. Thus, the purpose of this experiment is to see if there is a stark difference of information security awareness between generations Z and Y. Data was gathered from students at two public universities, one was a large and culturally diverse school and the other was a smaller historically black university in southern Virginia. Participants from the larger school were recruited from the school’s research pool database for psychology students, while students from the smaller school were sent a survey via secure hyperlink through email. The students taking part in the experiment had to be born from 1977 and 1999 to show that they were from either generation Y or Z while still being above the age of 18. It was hypothesized that generation Z would show more cyber security awareness due to them being involved with computer technology during their young life.

A demographics questionnaire was created for the experiment in which the participants were asked to give their age, gender, race, and ethnicity. It was found that the majority of the sample were African American or Caucasian female undergraduates, and about 65% of which were born from 1995 and 1999. “The current study utilized a portion of the items from the

Online Security Behaviors and Beliefs Questionnaire (OSBBQ), which is a Likert-scaled questionnaire consisting of 75 items assessing perceptions of information security awareness and associated self-reported behaviors, items ask respondents to rate their degree of comfort with specific information and cybersecurity-related tasks and to evaluate their computer and Internet abilities.” Put simply, the students were given questions regarding cybersecurity behaviors and asked to answer honestly. For example, one of the statements asked was, I use different passwords for my different social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn). Then the results were gathered and calculated to see which generation had the lowest cyber security awareness. However, since most of the sample size was found to be adults from generation Z some of the data was adjusted to balance the results.

The Results of this experiment showed that “the younger, Generation Z adults from this sample demonstrated less endorsement of widely known cybersecurity best practices.” and Generation Y those who are older where shown to be more likely to conduct themselves safely over the internet. With the results of the experiment shown to disprove the hypothesis we some educated guess can be made to rationalize why. The most popular idea is that those of generation Y were already of age when the internet started to rise in popularity and with their wisdom and the additional years of being engaged in a digital-technology world. “Given that Generation Z adults were barely adolescents at that time, it is understandable that Generation Y adults may comparatively seem to be more hypervigilant to potential risks.” I found the results interesting because I also thought that the younger generation would show more awareness to safe cyber practices since they grew up with computer technology. However, after seeing the results and reason Generation Y showed more cyber security literacy, I can easily believe that the older generation would conduct themselves more carefully.

The article strongly relates to the social science aspect of cyber security as it deals with human psychology and how different environments while growing up can affect how one conducts themselves over the internet. This can be connected back to the idea of determinism, or how all events were decided completely by one's earlier experiences in life. Being that certain generations had different societal systems that put more emphasis on computer and internet familiarity could influence how safe they are online. Speaking of societal systems, I believe that the biggest determining factor for best cyber-practices would be the societal movement to a more technologically inclusive upbringing. As time progresses computer literacy is becoming a more

sought-after skill set and seems almost necessary currently. Being that as it may it simply makes more sense that those with a high understanding of computer systems would know how to protect themselves online. I believe that this article does well in what it can contribute to spreading awareness about information security. Being that just because someone was born into a generation with a high emphasis on computer literacy does not inherently mean that they are immune to frauds and other forms of cybercrime. Lastly, If I had to change something regarding the experiments it would be how they gathered participants for their survey. Being that 65% of them were part of Generation Z; additionally, many of the participants were found to be either African American or Caucasian females I believe this could have skewed the results. Females are not commonly interested in many aspects of computer related sciences, nor information security, additionally, African Americans are faced with the highest poverty rate at 19.5%, this could hurt the exposure to the internet being that computers are so expensive especially 5 or more years ago.

Work Cited

Debb, Scott M., et al. "A Reverse Digital Divide: Comparing Information Security Behaviors of Generation Y and Generation Z Adults." *Center for Cybercrime Investigation & Cybersecurity*, International Journal of Cybersecurity Intelligence & Cybercrime, 28 Feb. 2020, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=ijcic>.