Name(s)

Anna L. Brewer

Project Number

J0404

Project Title

The Effect of Gender and Profile Picture on Popularity of Fake Facebook Accounts

Abstract

Objectives/Goals
To determine if the number of junior high students willing to accept a Facebook friend request from a random stranger can be increased by listing a certain gender or profile picture.

Methods/Materials
Three possible names (a boy's name, a girl's name, and a gender-neutral name) and three possible pictures (a cute puppy, a photo of a teen, and the default blank profile picture) were mixed and matched to create eight fake Facebook accounts. Requests were sent out to three groups of junior high students including both boys and girls. Each group received requests from two or three of the profiles. Over a period of eight days, data was collected about how many people accepted those requests.

Results
The most-accepted profiles were the girl with the puppy picture and the gender-neutral profile with no picture. The profile of a boy with a teen boy's picture got significantly less acceptances than other profiles.

Conclusions/Discussion
Junior high students are most likely to accept friend requests from profiles that appear very innocent and non-threatening (females with pictures of cute animals) or profiles onto which they can project their own image of who they want it to be (no gender listed, no picture). People often tended not to accept males, perhaps because they were perceived as threatening. People also tended not to accept profiles with teens' photos, likely because these allowed users to verify that they did not know the person.

Summary Statement

This project studied the factors that influence a junior high student's decision to accept a Facebook friend request from a random and potentially dangerous stranger.

Help Received

Family members helped me verify multiple Facebook accounts by providing cell phone numbers and reporting security texts. Mom brainstormed ideas with me; helped organize and simplify my tables and graphs; assisted with wording my discussion.