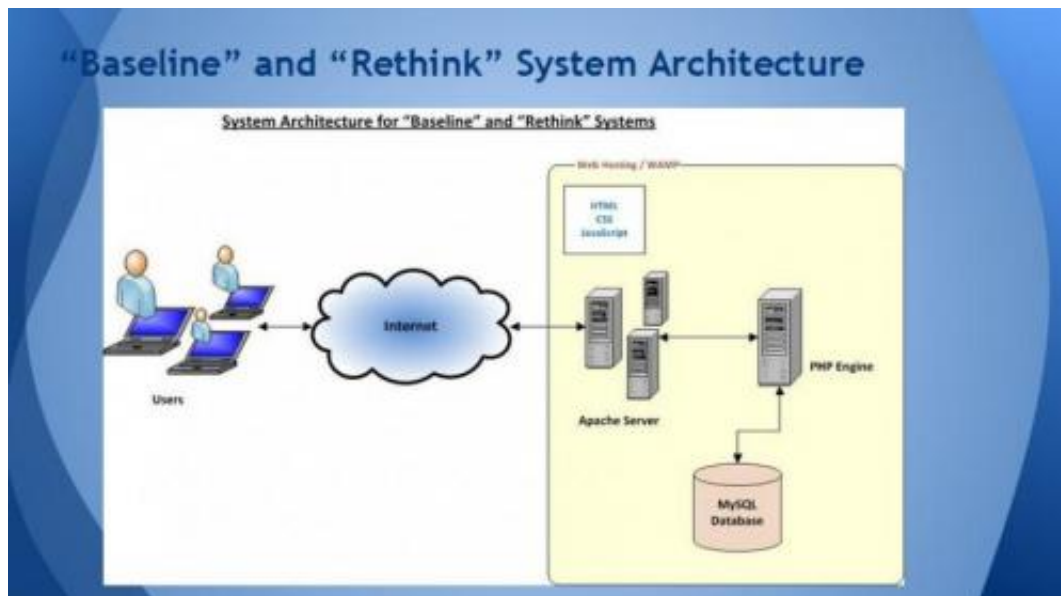


Google contest finalist at 14 has way out of cyberbullying

August 8 2014, by Nancy Owano



A 14 year-old student selected as a Google Science Fair 2014 finalist has come up with a Rethink project that asks teenagers to reread hurtful messages before sending them off and having to deal with consequences they never considered before hitting Send. Trisha Prabhu entered the contest at 13 with a distinct distaste for cyberbullying and wanting to come up with a solution to help teenagers think twice. "I am looking forward to a future where we have conquered cyber-bullying!" she said in her project notes. Her hypothesis: If adolescents from ages 12 to 18

were given an alert mechanism that suggested to them to revisit their decision to post a hurtful message on social media, the number of hurtful messages would drop lower than for those adolescents not provided with such an alert.

Thinking twice before doing something is not an especially strong skill among [teenagers](#). "As found in this research," she observed in her project descriptions, "the Prefrontal Cortex is not fully developed during adolescence years." Study Methods: She created Baseline and Rethink systems, where both asked users if they were willing to post a series of predetermined messages online. She did 1500 trials.

There were 150 girls and 150 boys participating. Each participated in five trials. She chose a set of five mean and hurtful message examples and used them for testing in both systems. Names used in the example hurtful messages were kept generic. Results: 67 percent of those using the Baseline system were ready to publish malicious remarks. (Out of 750 trials in Baseline, teens were willing to post mean/hurtful messages in 504 of those trials, resulting in the willingness of 67.2% to post mean/hurtful messages.) Numbers for the Rethink results were quite different. On the Rethink side, 93.43% of the teen participants decided not to post mean or hurtful things after alerts to rethink their messages' contents.

Prabhu would like to do more with her contest entry. Moving forward, she said she already took a next step to put together a prototype showing how she envisions this "Rethink" system could work with [social media](#) sites and apps to prevent cyber-bullying at the source before it happens. As for her own future, she said she would want to major in neuroscience, "then spend my life unraveling the secrets of the brain."

More information: Project: goo.gl/oTBUvq

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Citation: Google contest finalist at 14 has way out of cyberbullying (2014, August 8) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2014-08-google-contest-finalist-cyberbullying.html>

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