



The International Conference on Communication and Media 2014 (i-COME'14), 18-20 October 2014, Langkawi, MALAYSIA

What is Upsetting Our Children Online?

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Abstract

The Internet offers children opportunities as well as risks. However, the risks children are exposed to are still unknown. A total number of 420 Malaysian children aged 9-16 were asked to fill a 54-items questionnaire measuring Child Online Risks. The result shows that children are more exposed to 'Unwanted Exposure to pornography' such as seeing obscene materials on websites (31%), and 'Potential harmful risks' such as seeing bloody movies or photos (26%), people being beaten up (26%), and hate messages (16 %). Malaysian children are in danger to encounter with online risks such as pornography and violence materials.

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Peer-review under responsibility of School of Multimedia Technology & Communication, Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Keywords: Unwanted exposure to pornography; online sexual risky behaviour; cyber bully; conduct risk; contact risks

1. Introduction

Along with increasing access to the Internet, there are a growing number of risks for heavy Internet users particularly for youngsters. Although studies on online risks in Malaysia are still scarce, there is still plenty of research indicated the negative consequences of higher Internet usage among children. The scholars strongly believed that the negative effects of the Internet might influence children's behavioral and social development (Baboo, Pandian, Prasad, & Rao, 2013). Since there are cultural barriers to talk about topics such as sexual related risks in Malaysia, there are many knowledge gaps about the child online risks, which are increasingly raised. It

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would be a big mistake to believe that online risks only affect a society, which is freer to discuss about sexual related issues compared to the society with the cultural barrier. Therefore, this study aimed to describe the level of online risks among Malaysian children.

2. Child online risks

More than 11 million people aged 15 and older accessed to the Internet in Malaysia (Malaysians watching more online videos, 2011). As more people use the Internet to make the life easier, they have greater exposure to various forms of cyber-crimes and many of these crimes are targeted at children. According to the Malaysian Norton Online Family Report (2010), Malaysian children spend an average of 19 hours per week going online; nine out of 10 were exposed to the negative experiences of the Internet (Noh & Ab Rahman, 2013).

Ismail (2011) found that Malaysian children are exposed to online risks including cyber-bullying, cyber-grooming, Identity theft, and pornography. Online risky behaviors also can be activities such as hacking and downloading illegal content (Livingstone & Bober, 2009), providing personal information (e.g. Home address, school address, and phone number) (Youn, 2009), meeting friends online, offline (Liau, Khoo, & Ang, 2008), and risky sexual behaviors (Baumgartner, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010). Previous research has shown that looking for sexual partners while online, may increase the risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases (McFarlane, Bull, & Rietmeijer, 2002), misuse of intimate information by others (Moreno et al., 2009), and feel embarrassed (Baumgartner, Valkenburg & Peter, 2010).

3. Methods and materials

The population of this study is student aged 9 to 16 years old in the state of Selangor, which has the highest Internet users in Malaysia. From two randomly selected districts (Gombak and Sepang), two secondary and two primary schools in rural and urban area were selected. The total population of students aged 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 16 years old in the eight schools were 6671. In this study, students aged 12 to 15 were excluded since they have to sit for a national exam. The required sample size for the present study was 365. To account for some possible complications that may occur throughout the research such as incomplete responses the questionnaire was administered to 480 children. However, only 420 questionnaires have complete information. Thus, the present study is based on 420 respondents. The data collection took about 1 month from August to 5 September 2013.

4. Measurement

Nine measurements with 45 items have been adopted and adapted to test the overall patterns of online risks exposed to children. All 45 items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*), 2 (*seldom*), 3 (*sometimes*), 4 (*often*), to 5 (*very often*). The questionnaire was prepared in both English and Malay language. Due to the cultural boundaries, the sensitive words were changed in order to get the approval letter from the ministry of education for data collection. "Having sex" replaced by "having an inappropriate intimate relationship"; "naked picture" and "showing sexual acts and content" replaced by "obscene picture" and "obscene acts or material" respectively. The nine measurements used for the study were as follows:

- Unwanted exposure to pornography developed by Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor (2007) is a four-item scale which asked whether children have seen any materials (message, email, website, or link) that showed pictures of naked people or of people having sex accidentally.
- Unwanted online sexual solicitation is a two-item scale developed by Baumgartner, Valkenburg, & Peter (2010) and Wolak et al. (2007) which asked respondents whether they have been asked to talk about sex/to do something sexually unwanted online?
- Risky sexual online behavior was measured by four items scale developed by Baumgartner et al. (2010) and Wolak et al. (2007) which asked the respondents whether they searched for someone on the Internet to talk about sex/to have sex; sent a photo or video on which they were partly naked to someone they knew only online; sent an address or telephone number online to someone they knew only online.

- Seeing sexual content (sexting and sexual images) is an eight-scale measurement adapted and adopted from Livingstone, Haddon, & Görzig (2011) which asked about the respondents' experiences whether they have been sent or sending images or video showing people naked/having sex/sex in a violent way.
- Potentially harmful user-generated content is a four items scale adapt and adopted from Livingstone et al. (2011) which asked children whether they ever seen a bloody movie/photo, videos of people beaten up or harmed, hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals, ways to be very thin (such as being anorexic or bulimic), talk about or share their experiences of taking drugs, ways of physically harming or hurting themselves, and ways of committing suicide.
- Bullying and online sexual harassment were measuring with ten items adapted and adopted from Livingstone et al. (2011); Wolak et al.(2007); and Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor (2007)
- Contact risk (meeting new people online) is a three-item scale adapted from Livingstone et al. (2011) which asked respondents whether they had experienced contacting with someone they met online and get bothered/seeing or received sexual messages and get bothered them/ been encouraged to run away from home by anyone on the Internet.
- Personal data misuse is a four-item scale adapted from Livingstone et al. (2011) which asked children whether they have experienced somebody used their password to access their information or to pretend to be them; lose money, and personal data misuse of any kind.
- Conduct risk Child as an actor is a scale adapted and adopted from Livingstone et al. (2011) which asked children whether they had ever gambled, Illegal download, being hacked, created a profile in porn website or uploading pornography materials.

5. Findings

The sample of the study consisted of 420 (34% boy and 66% girl) with the mean age of 12.6 years (SD= 2.28). The majority of respondents (73.7%) were Malay and 74.2% were Muslim. Forty-four percent of the respondents used the Internet every day and 38% of them used the Internet weekly. Most of the respondents (79%) used the Internet where their parents could see what they were doing. Children start using the Internet at the average age of three. The device that the children mostly used were Laptop (32.9%) followed by Smartphone (13.6%), Desktop computer (12.4%) and iPad (7.6), however 16.5% of them (n=66) using all the mentioned devices to be online. For the overall negative experiences, children were asked to answer two yes/no questions. Of the total respondents, 36% of them experienced something on the Internet that has bothered them in some way, for example, made them feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that they should not have seen it," while 58% have not (6% of them did not answer this item). Moreover, 61% of them think that there are things on the Internet, which are not proper for their age, while 32% of them did not think in this way (7% of them did not answer this item).

To describe the level of online risks among children, those who answered "seldom, sometimes, often, or more often" are considered as the respondents who have already been exposed to online risks. From nine online-risk categories, the highest mean was for 'unwanted exposure to pornography' and the lowest mean was for 'conduct risk'. The result of 'unwanted exposure to pornography' measurement shows that the highest risk was for item 'unwanted obscene materials on web' which more than half of the respondents have been exposed to it. While, seeing 'naked picture or inappropriate intimate relationship on the message or link' was the lowest risk. From 'potentially harmful user-generated content', the second highest risk category, almost 58% of children have 'seen bloody movies or photos' following by 'seen people beating up' and 'seen hate messages'. From the category of 'personal data misuse', less than 20% were exposed to 'misuse of password' followed by 'misuse of personal information'. In the category of 'unwanted online sexual solicitation', nearly 20% of the respondents were exposed to risk when 'being asked to talk about inappropriate acts'. From the category of 'sexting', one fifth of respondents was 'being posted inappropriate material' which was the highest rate and the lowest rate as for those who have 'seen obscene images or videos about private parts'. From 'risky sexual online behaviour' category, the highest mean was for 'sent address or phone number to anyone they only knew online' and lowest mean was for item asking if respondent never 'sent obscene photos to someone they only knew online'. In 'contact risk', the higher risk mean was for 'contact someone never met face to face' and the lowest mean was for 'meet someone face to face that they only knew online and get bothered'. The item of 'received inappropriate messages that bothered children' was the

highest risk from ‘bullying’ measurement, and the lowest risk was for children who ‘received inappropriate messages encourage them to run away’. Finally, from ‘conduct risk’, the lowest risks that children were exposed to, less than 10% ‘downloaded illegal content accidentally’. The frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of responses are presented in table1.

Table1. The mean, Std. Deviation, frequency, and percentage of children online risks.

Items	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
Unwanted Exposure to Pornography						1.55	.83
Unwanted obscene materials on web	191(45.5%)	102(24.3)	95 (22.6)	22 (5.2)	10 (2.4)	1.95	1.05
Unwanted e-mail or IM	291(69.3%)	74(17.6%)	35(8.3%)	15(3.6%)	5(1.2%)	1.50	0.88
Unwanted obscene materials on message or link	281(66.9%)	88(21%)	43(10.2%)	7(1.7%)	1 (.2%)	1.47	0.76
Received naked picture or inappropriate intimate relationship	338(80.5%)	51(12.1%)	27(6.4%)	4(1.0%)	0	1.28	0.62
Potentially Harmful User-Generated Content						1.41	.63
Seen bloody movies or photos	177(42.1%)	139(33.1%)	71(16.9%)	22(5.2%)	11(2.6%)	1.93	1.02
Seen people beaten up	170(40.5%)	144(34.3%)	82(19.5%)	22(5.2%)	2(.5%)	1.91	0.92
Seen hate messages	271(64.5%)	87(20.7%)	42(10.0%)	16(3.8%)	4(1.0%)	1.56	0.89
Seen anorexia or bulimic	336(80.0%)	51(12.1%)	26(6.2%)	5(1.2%)	2(.5%)	1.30	0.68
Talk about drugs	395(94.0%)	13(3.1%)	11(2.6%)	1(.2%)	0	1.09	0.39
Ways of physical harming	400(95.2%)	17(4.0%)	3(.7%)	0	0	1.05	0.26
Ways of committing suicide	408(97.1%)	9(2.1%)	2(.5%)	1(.2%)	0	1.04	0.25
Personal Data Misuse						1.35	.77
Misuse of password	342(81.4%)	51(12.1%)	22(5.2%)	5(1.2%)		1.26	0.61
Misuse of personal information you didn't like	377(89.8%)	30(7.1%)	11(2.6%)	1(.2%)	1(.2%)	1.14	0.47
Being hacked	385(91.7%)	31(7.4%)	4(1.0%)	0	0	1.09	0.32
Misuse of personal information	377(89.8%)	30(7.1%)	11(2.6%)	1(.2%)	1(.2%)	1.07	0.29
Lost money being cheat online	408(97.1%)	8(1.9)	2(.5)	2(.5)	0	1.04	0.28
Unwanted Online Sexual Solicitation						1.17	.48
Anyone ask to talk about inappropriate acts	345(82.1%)	55(13.1%)	18(4.3%)	1(.2%)	1 (.2%)	1.23	0.56
Anyone ask to do inappropriate acts	383(91.2%)	29(6.9%)	7 1.7%)	0	1 (.2%)	1.11	0.40
Sexting						1.17	.44
Being posted inappropriate material	338(80.5%)	65(15.5%)	15(3.6%)	2(.5%)	0	1.24	0.53
Received inappropriate messages (words, pictures and videos)	337(80.2%)	68(16.2%)	14(3.3%)	1(.2%)		1.24	0.51
Being sent inappropriate messages	357(85.0%)	55(13.1%)	6(1.4%)	1(.2%)	1(.2%)	1.18	0.47
Seen obscene images or videos	360(85.7%)	51(12.1%)	9(2.1%)			1.16	0.42
Seen other people perform obscene acts	362(86.2%)	49(11.7%)	8(1.9%)	1(.2%)	0	1.16	0.43
Seen intimate images or videos in violent way	365(86.9%)	46(11.0%)	9(2.1%)	0		1.15	0.42
Seen someone obscene images or videos	373(88.8%)	43(10.2%)	4(1.0%)	0	0	1.12	0.36
Seen obscene images or videos about private parts	380(90.5%)	35(8.3%)	5(1.2%)	0	0	1.11	0.35
Risky Sexual Online Behaviour						1.16	.46
Sent address or phone number to someone knew online	360(85.7%)	51(12.1%)	9(2.1%)	0	0	1.43	0.88
Search someone to talk about intimate relationship	387(92.1%)	22(5.2%)	9(2.1%)	2(.5%)	0	1.11	0.41
Search someone to do intimate relationship	402(95.7%)	12(2.9%)	5(1.2%)	1(.2%)	0	1.06	0.33
Sent obscene photos to someone you only knew online	411(97.9%)	6(1.4%)	2(.5%)	1(.2%)	0	1.03	0.23
Contact Risk						1.12	.77
Contact someone never met face to face	297(70.7%)	63(15.0%)	45(10.7%)	11(2.6%)	4(1.0%)	1.48	0.86
Meet someone face to face that you only knew online	320(76.2%)	53(12.6%)	22 (5.2%)	17(4.0%)	8(1.9%)	1.43	0.91
Meet someone that you only knew online and get bothered	380(90.5%)	24(5.7%)	9(2.1%)	6(1.4%)	1(.2%)	1.15	0.54
Bullying /Online Sexual Harassment						1.11	.36
Received inappropriate messages that bothered you	338(80.5%)	68(16.2%)	11(2.6%)	1(.2%)	2(.5%)	1.24	0.55
Received nasty or hurtful messages	351(83.6%)	56(13.3%)	12(2.9%)	1(.2%)	0	1.20	0.48
Being left out or excluded	378(90.0%)	31(7.4%)	9(2.1%)	1(.2%)	1(.2%)	1.13	0.45
Received other nasty or hurtful messages	372(88.6%)	43(10.2%)	4(1.0%)	1(.2%)		1.13	0.38
Received nasty or hurtful messages about yourself	386(91.9%)	29(6.9%)	4(1.0%)	1(.2%)	0	1.10	0.35
Being threatened online	393(93.6%)	22(5.2%)	5(1.2%)	0	0	1.08	0.31
Being asked to talk about nasty acts	401(95.5%)	18(4.3%)	1(.2%)	0	0	1.05	0.22
Being asked to show my private part	404(96.2%)	14(3.3%)	1(.2%)	1(.2%)	0	1.05	0.25
Received inappropriate message encourage you to run away	409(97.4%)	8(1.9%)	3(.7%)	0	0	1.03	0.22
Conduct Risk						1.06	.32
Illegal download accidentally	390(92.9%)	16(3.8%)	10(2.4%)	3(.7%)	1(.2%)	1.12	0.47
Create profile in inappropriate website	412(98.1%)	4(1.0%)	2(.5%)	1(.2%)	1(.2%)	1.04	0.30
Gamble online	415(98.8%)	4(1.0%)	1(.2%)	0	0	1.02	0.18

Note: 1: never, 2: seldom, 3: sometimes, 4: often, and 5: very often. M: mean, SD: standard deviation.

6. Discussion

The Internet offers several opportunities as well as risks for children. The risk children are exposed to, is vary in different contexts. Despite the facts that Internet related risks has received research attention in recent years, not much is known about the individual and country differences in engaging in risky behavior such as sexting (Baumgartner, Sumter, Peter, Valkenburg, & Livingstone, 2014). Most of the studies about child online risks are conducted in the United States and European countries. Not much has been conducted to test whether the findings from the US and Europe can be generalized in Malaysia. The aim of the present study, therefore, was to apply the western classification of Internet related risks to children, in order to describe the level of online risks among Malaysian children.

This study revealed that about half of the children have been exposed to the online risk, while almost half of them never think that using the Internet may contribute negative outcomes. Although child Internet users have been exposed to the online risks, they are not thinking about the possibility of online risks. It means they need to be aware of the potential harmful moment and being safe while online. The results of this study showed that 31% of Malaysian children are exposed to ‘Unwanted Exposure to pornography’ such as seeing obscene materials on websites. Although exposure to pornography is higher compared to other risks, the rate is still less than other studies (Wolak et al., 2007), which found that forty-two percent of Internet users had been exposed to online pornography. This study also indicated that 26% of respondents are exposed to ‘potential harmful risks’ such as seeing bloody movies or photos, and people being beaten up, and hate messages (16%). Results also showed that only 1% of the children in Malaysia are exposed to online risks such as risky sexual online behavior, data misuse, conduct risk, and bullying. The result unexpectedly rejected the perception of the high rate of cyberbullying in Malaysia. In contrast with the EU kids online report, which shown that 31% of European children have been exposed to risky sexual online activities, this study found that only 1% of children had sexual risky behavior experience. The results of this study are consistent with other studies (Livingstone et al., 2011) which indicated that the risks in which children experiencing in Internet are different in different contexts. EU kids online also found that 15 % of children were exposed to sexting, which is almost similar to the result of this study.

It must be noted that some risks are not potentially risky, such as meeting new people online, but any risks such as talking about drugs, search for ways of committing suicide, and gambling are dangerous for children and must be taken seriously. According to Livingstone et al. (2011), the risks do not necessarily result in harm, for such judgments to depend on the outcome of the activity. In conclusion, Malaysian children are in danger to encounter with online risks such as pornography and violence materials. Therefore, further study need to be conducted to identify strategies to reduce the online risks.

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