Research Papers

NU (DE) MEDIA: A PRELIMINARY STUDY INTO THE YOUNG PEOPLES' ACCESS TO PORNOGRAPHY THROUGH THE NEW MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Over the last few years, the rapid growth of new media has dramatically transformed the way we communicate, live and work. In the process, new and increasingly complex social, ethical, legal and regulatory issues have emerged which society and policy makers will have to grapple with. For example, problems such as protecting children from access to harmful and inappropriate content, Internet addiction and cyber bullying have become more pronounced. New media has changed the way we communicate, work and live. The extensive use of broadband Internet and mobile phones among youngsters reflects the positive attitude that they have towards new media. However, it is not without risks. Along with its many benefits come new social, legal, regulatory and ethical concerns.

INTRODUCTION:

Protection of youngsters is a universal concern, and different countries have different ways of dealing with it. Advances in new media technology and the evolving way children are using and adapting to this technology make this a complex issue, rendering short term solutions such as filtering ineffective in the long run. The different needs of children of various ages also means that a "one-size" fits all solution is not feasible. Children are exposed to a myriad of risks such as access to illegal and inappropriate material, online sexual predators, cyber bullying and addiction.

The Internet has changed how information is made available to the masses. Information that is uploaded and indexed on the web is easily searchable, and much more readily accessible as compared to paper-based collections. Consumers of information have a much wider range of media to choose from. While the Internet and new media have brought enormous benefits to everyone, it has also resulted in new dangers for a vulnerable section of our society – youngsters.

The ease of access to information and the proliferation of pornography, violence and other inappropriate content online have made it much easier for a minor to obtain or come into contact with such content. In the UK, it was found that among minors aged 9-19, 31 per cent had received unwanted sexual comments online and 57 per cent of them had seen pornography online, mostly involuntarily. Most of the respondents were tricked into visiting these offensive sites by deceptive "pop-up" windows or had received hyperlinks to such material through unsolicited email.

Similarly, the Media Awareness Network (MNet) in Canada found that while most children had positive experiences online, many of the more popular websites among minors contained inappropriate content. Aside from explicit adult content and extreme violence, MNet also recommended that minors should be taught to deal with websites that normalise and promote hate speech and racially or ethnically prejudiced speech. Children may not have the maturity or experience to identify the divisive or dangerous nature of such forms of expression.

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Another trend resulting in new media effects on minors is the growth in the popularity of mobile Internet access, whereby people can access the Internet from various portable devices such as mobile phones and wifi-enabled devices. Both South Korea and Japan have shown a high adoption rate of mobile phones and the use of mobile Internet, especially by youths. A 2006 study conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication showed that more than half of the population, in particular teenagers, sent email and surfed the Internet via their mobile phones to such an extent that some no longer accessed their email accounts on their computers.

Meanwhile, in South Korea, a 2007 NIDA survey showed that 46.2 per cent of all Internet users and 74.1 per cent of Internet users aged 12-19 used their mobile phones to access the Internet.This increase in the usage of mobile Internet is making it more difficult for parents to physically supervise and provide guidance over the content that children are accessing online.

Increasing individual consumption of media content too is a big issue. Ofcom's recent Media Literacy Audit Report showed that youths' bedrooms were increasingly becoming media centres where they were left to entertain themselves with media. Parents who allowed their children to use the Internet independently were also less likely to establish ground rules to guide their children's media consumption.

This paper attempts a study into young peoples' access to pornography through the new media. However, further research would be required to establish what effect pornography has on young peoples' attitudes towards sex and whether it influences how they conduct sexual relationships. Research on the access, availability, and other issues related with pornography among minors took place over a one month period from December 2011 to January 2012. Initial interviews with male and female minors from various colleges in and around Ambala provided initial insight into the ways youngsters themselves view pornography and sexual behavior. Anonymous surveys of minors and observation studies of locations selling and/or showing pornography were then conducted in and around Ambala. The numbers give a picture of how widespread youngsters' access to pornography is, as well as an indication of the types of pornography available to college children.

METHODOLOGY: Informal group discussions with minors in Ambala and surrounding areas sought to ascertain a preliminary understanding of young people's knowledge and attitudes towards pornography, which informed the development of the data collection tools.

The study used the following definitions:

College Student: The term 'college student' refers to those who are studying at undergraduate or post graduate level.

Pornography: Any form of communication that portrays sexual behavior in a manner that only intends to cause sexual excitement.

Hard pornography: Visual depiction of nude figures performing explicit sexual acts in order to cause sexual excitement, including or combined with violence, masochism, sadism, rape, coercion or force.

Soft pornography: Non-explicit visual depiction of nude or semi-nude figures in order to cause sexual excitement

Volunteer researchers were engaged to contact the respondents. The researchers were chosen from among the college students given the sensitive nature of the questions and the difficulties young people have in discussing matters of such intimacy with strangers.

A. Questionnaire Survey

The sample of minors included 200 boys and girls aged from both rural and urban areas (in and around Ambala). The questionnaire was designed to be simple and easy to understand, in order to avoid misunderstandings about meanings and definitions of pornography. The students participating in the study were assured their answers would remain anonymous.

B. Observation Study

The observational study method was used to look for the display and availability of porn material in the open market. The sample of vendors included a total of 96 locations including, 27 video shops, 38 mobile downloading centers and 31 cybercafés. Most observations were made in and around Ambala.

Findings: Some astonishing figures came up while the data collected was analyzed. A total 62% of the youngsters surveyed admitted that they have viewed pornography in one form or the other. Meanwhile, the males were found more interested in porn material.

Among the new media, mobile phone served the porn content to 73.6% of the users, internet to 15.20 % and rest accessed the other electronic media such as DVDs and Cds. Also, the availability of porn material in the market is an

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issue of concern. It was found that the market is almost full of vendors supplying such material, the biggest players being the mobile downloading centers. It was observed that 17% of the vendors openly displayed the material while 49% kept it hidden. Meanwhile, 34% of them kept it partially hidden, alluring the youngsters to access the same. The lack of parental supervision and guidance is another vital area of concern. Among those who were surveyed, 83.4 % youngsters admitted that their parents never bothered what they are doing with their gadgets, while 13.5 % of them said that their parents often asked about what they are doing on the internet or on the mobile phone. Meanwhile only a 3.1% of the youngsters admitted that their parents are strictly watchful of their new media behavior. However, this lack of supervision does not always indicate nonchalance on the part of parents but could be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the nature of new media consumption is largely individualistic. Coupled with the rise of mobile Internet devices, parents may find it difficult to constantly supervise their children.

A second possible reason is that parents are unaware about their children's online activities or are unable to monitor them as they were not savvy with new media. The concept of "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" illustrates this divide. The conventional parent-child relationship involves the parent having more experience and thus being in a better position to advise and supervise. However with new media, the "digital natives" who are born into a world where new media already exists, have no problems adapting to it and possess more technical knowledge than their parents, the "digital immigrants". The natives would be aware of ways to circumvent their parents' methods of monitoring their new media activities
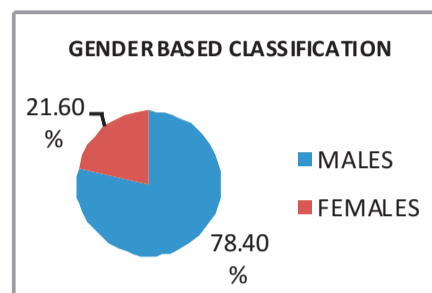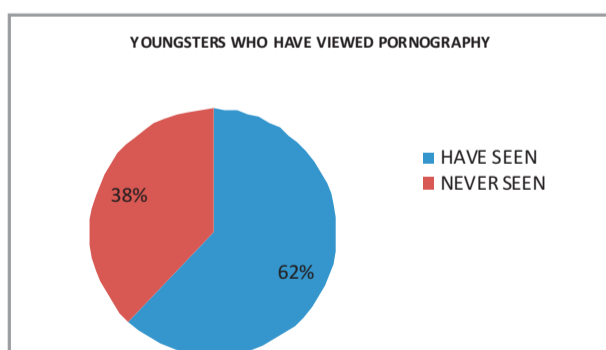
GENDER BASED CLASSIFICATION

TABLE 2

TABLE 3

SOURCES OF PORN ACCESS

TABLE 4

PARENTAL WATCH

TABLE 5

DISPLAY OF PORN MATERIAL IN MARKET

TABLE1

YOUNGSTERS WHO HAVE VIEWED PORNOGRAPHY

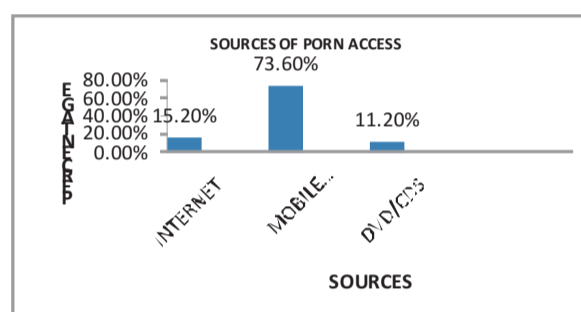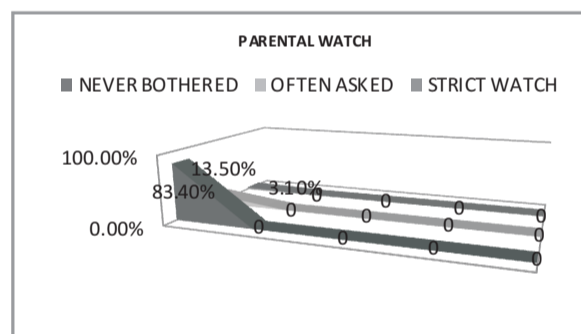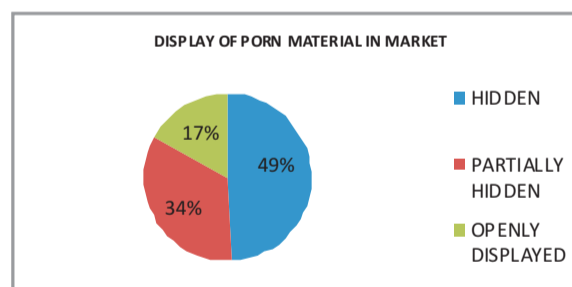**Conclusion:**

The intent of this study was to assess the accessibility of pornography to youngsters and to gain an initial understanding of how widespread pornography is. The findings suggest that the youngsters have a high access to pornography and more importantly that pornography is widely available. The findings also indicate that minors

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are confronted with pornography mainly through new media. This research and report are not concerned with taking a moral stance against pornography. Inconclusive evidence exists about the effects of pornography in general; with some research suggesting there may be positive as well as negative effects depending on the context. The main recommendation of this report is that qualitative research be conducted in order to understand better the sexual attitudes of youngsters and to what extent they receive adequate information. It is the role pornography plays in forming these attitudes and attendant patterns of sexual behavior youngsters that now need to be looked at. It is conceivable that such research will show that pornography is seen by young people as a fantasy world and has no bearing on their development conversely it might be shown to be highly detrimental as a sole source of sexual and relationship education. But given its availability and the number of young people who chose to access it would be unwise not to examine the issue in more depth.

A further recommendation is that organizations provide sex education, in order to provide a more balanced view of sexual behavior than is presently available.

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3.   Hiroko, T. (2007, November 5). PCs getting pushed aside by other, powerful gadgets. The Japan Times.
4.   Office of Communications (Ofcom), United Kingdom. (2008). Media Literacy Audit. Retrieved from http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/ml_childrens08/
5.   The concept of the "digital native" and the "digital immigrant" was proposed by Marc Prensky in 2001. Digital natives describes the generation of people born into the digital world and are "'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet,". Digital immigrants are those born in an age before computers and have adapted to the new environment. Prensky suggests that despite being adaptable, digital immigrants will always retain a "digital immigrant accent" and instinctively react in the traditional manner they were originally socialised to react.Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. On the Horizon, 9(5), 1-6..